

FUEL POVERTY ACTION

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

FUEL POVERTY ACTION



“Fuel Poverty Action have been important partners over the past year, providing valuable contributions as we developed our Warm Homes campaign. We value their insight and perspective on the lived experiences of fuel poverty.”

**Tony Bosworth, Energy campaigner,
Friends of the Earth**

“Fuel Poverty Action draws their influence from the grassroots. Their unique ability to directly support people who are struggling, tell truth to power and offer solutions at the same time, makes them a powerful campaigning force that this government underestimates at its peril.”

Clive Lewis, Labour Party MP for Norwich South

“This year more than any has shown the importance of the work that FPA carry out. Their campaigns highlight the persistent failings of our government and their energy policies over many years. No single event has created the mess we find ourselves in today, and Fuel Poverty Action has consistently highlighted these issues long before they made the headlines.”

Matthew Lay, National Officer for Energy UNISON

“The campaigning being done by Fuel Poverty Action is critical. They have transformed the conversation about making sure nobody is cold in their home – and that’s started to transform the kind of changes it’s now possible to win.”

Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion

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INTRODUCTION

2021-22 has been an extraordinary year – in the world and for FPA. For us, it started peacefully enough with our 2021 AGM, which was also a celebration of our 10 years anniversary.

We charted our development as a small, grassroots, largely unfunded group dedicated to uniting the allegedly incompatible goals of fighting climate change and making sure people can afford to access the energy we need.

And we celebrated, sharing virtual drinks, jokes and music, the warmth that has grown out of working with each other: some young people fitting FPA campaigning into weekends and the hours after work, some pensioners, some in fuel poverty, some comfortably off.

Then began an intensive autumn and winter in which we continued the work we've been doing for the last decade – together with allied organisations – on housing, heating, energy sources and our ongoing work with people in crisis.

We've still done our best to support residents and local groups, including highlighting the injustice of District Heating users being left out of the Energy Price Guarantee. This work all continued throughout the year. But to be honest, it was squeezed in around the edges of what became our – and the country's – chief preoccupation: how to respond to the soaring cost of gas.



Delivering Energy For All petition 19 Oct 2022
© Angela Christofilou

We not only continued to raise the inequities of the energy market in the media, with Ofgem and in energy forums, but launched a pathbreaking proposal for dealing with them, in the form of 'Energy For All'. We see Energy For All as a way to address a system that is profoundly upside down.

At the same time, we devoted ourselves to getting funding, hiring workers, and beginning internal changes in an organisation that is now growing very fast in size and influence.

Ruth London

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is startling how little was said a year ago about the connection between climate change and our standard of living here in Britain, let alone about the role of Big Oil in determining both. The “One Crisis” narrative, that Fuel Poverty Action had been shouting from the rooftops for a decade, was not yet widely accepted – as it is now.

FPA has been hugely influential in debates around how this reality should be reflected in demands and actions to relieve fuel poverty, both in the UK and in Europe.

Our starting point has been that the deaths, ill health and suffering from fuel poverty are totally avoidable, that far from a need for austerity there is plenty of money, and it should be taken first from the fossil fuel giants that are taking it from us.

This year we pressed “go” on our long-considered campaign for Energy For All: a radically different pricing system in which each household will receive enough energy, free, to cover its basic needs like heating, lighting, cooking, and charging phones, respirators or stair lifts. Under Energy For All this will be paid for by a higher tariff on energy used beyond what is needed, and by windfall taxes and an end to the millions of pounds of public money spent daily on fossil fuel subsidies.

Our Energy For All petition, launched in February, quickly gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures. The idea was supported by 75% of the UK population and endorsed, with some variations, by a wide range of grassroots and establishment organisations including the New Economics Foundation and the TUC.

Our rally before handing in the petition was supported by MPs from five parties, and we helped MPs to formulate and publicise a Private Members Bill and an Early Day Motion. FPA is politically neutral and interested in talking to any party or organisation that can offer solutions.

We continued to highlight and challenge injustices within the existing pricing system, including the operation of the Standing Charge, and the imposition of Prepayment Meters. Both these and many other inequities, e.g. those affecting households that heat by electricity, hit people on low incomes first and hardest.

With allies, we have continued to press hard for repair and retrofitting of the UK’s notoriously

leaky housing, while insisting that insulation must be safe, non-flammable, non-toxic, and installed in consultation with residents.

We have continued to support residents coping with expensive and unreliable District Heating systems, stepped in to challenge Ofgem over Northern Powergrid’s response to the Storm Arwen emergency affecting rural households, and supported residents using heat pumps unsuitably installed in tower blocks where they are too expensive to use.

We are active and respected members of a number of major coalitions including the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, the Warm This Winter coalition, the Windfall Tax Coalition, and in Europe, the Right to Energy Coalition. Our point of view on a wide range of issues and proposals is regularly sought by organisations of all types and sizes.

We have strengthened our relationships with climate organisations and organisations engaged in different forms of action, including Insulate Britain, Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, Don’t Pay, Greenpeace, and the Campaign Against Climate Change.

Our media presence this year has massively expanded, and is an important way in which we influence and inform debates.

We are working to ensure that, as we grow, our internal structures are as good as we can make them for onboarding new members, supporting staff, planning strategies, and making and implementing group decisions.

This has been a very successful year, with some significant achievements, but the growing demand for our work is outstripping what we are able to respond to. With more resources, we could support more grassroots groups to mobilise, signpost more people to the help they desperately need, more effectively point towards solutions that address both the climate and the cost of living crises, and build a base of support in Parliament, moving it towards effective action against fuel poverty.

“FPA are a rare organisation that are able to join the dots of the climate crisis and fuel poverty, with policy and campaigns rooted in the lived experience of working class people.”

Sam Mason, Policy Officer PCS trade union.

HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2021

Spoke at Action on Empty Homes' rally and day of action

NOVEMBER 2021

Wrote to Alok Sharma, President of COP26 with our demand for a windfall tax on the unprecedented profits of the energy industry.

NOVEMBER 2021

Spoke at Homes UK – 'The Future of Living Event' at the Excel Centre in London on 'How can landlords help residents in fuel poverty?'

NOVEMBER 2021

Organised demonstration jointly with National Pensioners Convention to mark the publication of "Excess Winter Deaths" statistics

AUTUMN/WINTER 2021/22

Led intensive discussions with allies in the UK and in Europe about how we should respond to the gas price crisis – above all, how to avoid pressing for measures which would further subsidise the fossil fuel industry.

FEBRUARY 2022

Launched Energy For All (e4a) petition.

APRIL 2022

Interviewed on video for national conference of Divas (women in the District Heating industry) and connected them with affected residents' own input

SPRING 2022

Active in the developing coalitions that began to merge cost of living issues with the movement against climate change; spoke at demonstrations in Parliament Square.

JUNE 2022

Took part in Heat Trust round table on Guaranteed Service Payments for users of failing District Heating systems

SUMMER 2022

Contacted by organisations engaged in direct action on climate including Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion, Greenpeace. Took part in and spoke at demonstrations, including one at Shell headquarters.

SEPTEMBER 2022

Filed a case against energy regulator Ofgem in the High Court, with the support of the Good Law Project. Began liaison with Don't Pay.

SEPTEMBER 2022

Worked with Clive Lewis MP on a Private Members Bill and Early Day Motion for the UK Parliament, calling for an energy allowance. Encouraged people to contact their MPs.

OCTOBER 2022

Delivered e4a petition to Downing Street with over 651,000 signatures, following a rally where a dozen MPs heard impassioned speeches from a wide range of grassroots, trade union and Parliamentary speakers.

OCTOBER 2022

Took part in a sit-in in Parliament organised by Greenpeace focused on how parliamentary chaos and lack of action on insulation was costing lives.

INFLUENCING AT EVERY LEVEL



Tax Justice UK at e4a rally, 19 Oct 2022
© Angela Christofilou

TAX REFORM

At COP 26 in Glasgow, at the start of our year, FPA members were among the thousands outside the halls of power, pressing desperately for policies proportionate to the urgency of the moment and the loss of life in an overheating world.

“I can’t speak highly enough about FPA — it’s very rare to have authentic spokespeople on fuel poverty who can also speak knowledgeably about the energy system and the need to rapidly phase out fossil fuels.”

Tessa Khan, founder and Executive Director of Uplift

During the conference we wrote to Alok Sharma, pressing for windfall taxes on oil companies’ huge profits, to be spent on relieving the plight of people in fuel poverty.

“In the UK, even before Covid, around 10,000 people died each year because they could not afford to keep warm... Millions of households are dreading this winter. In many countries, the poverty is still more acute, and the need is to keep cool as temperatures soar over 50 degrees C.

“We are tired of the question: ‘Where is the money to come from?’ to insulate homes, bolster incomes, and transition to renewable energy and heating. Instead, it’s time to focus on ‘Where is our money going?’.

Governments must commit to removing huge subsidies and windfall profits from oil corporations. As President of COP26 you should be seeking agreements that accomplish that goal.”

The call for a windfall tax took off and FPA was soon an active member of a newly formed Windfall Tax Coalition initiated by Tax Justice UK, Uplift, and 350.org

In May the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, did indeed announce a windfall tax, but alongside a “loophole” that gave fossil fuel corporations 91p for every pound they invested in their own, polluting, industry. With our allies in the Coalition we have been active in exposing and opposing this new subsidy and campaigning for taxes that would bring the UK’s yield from this industry in line with those of other major countries.

In June we responded to a government consultation on the Oil and Gas Levy Windfall Tax Bill. In September The New Economics Foundation (NEF) “Warm homes, cool planet” report, which supported a form of universal energy entitlement similar to Energy For All, noted that reforming windfall taxes could raise £22.6 billion in a year.

IN WESTMINSTER – ENERGY FOR ALL FINDS CHAMPIONS IN PARLIAMENT

A cross-party group of MPs sponsored Early Day Motion 470 calling for the Government to replace the price cap system with a free universal basic energy allowance.

In October, with his office working closely with FPA, Clive Lewis MP presented the Energy Equity Commission Bill, timed to coincide with delivery of our 651,000 signature petition.

Over twenty MPs and Peers from five parties signed up to come to the rally, where Clive Lewis, Caroline Lucas, Barry Gardiner and Lord Prem Sikka spoke.

FPA has attended Nadia Whittome MP’s series of roundtable meetings aimed at building a movement around the cost of living crisis.



Clive Lewis, MP at e4a rally
© Angela Christofilou



Caroline Lucas MP at e4a rally
© Angela Christofilou

“The campaigning being done by Fuel Poverty Action is critical. They have transformed the conversation about making sure nobody is cold in their home – and that’s started to transform the kind of changes it’s now possible to win.”

Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion

GLOBAL REACH

Fuel Poverty Action hugely influenced, and substantially drafted, the Civil Society Response to the Gas Price Rise, which was signed by over forty organisations across Europe. This document set out criteria that should determine forms of relief from the crisis. Templates based on these criteria were used by groups in member states to influence their governments ahead of the EU Energy Council meeting in July.

The proposal for Energy For All has achieved substantial support within the EU Commission.



© Right2Energy 2019

Fuel Poverty Action have always been a source of inspiration for us at Friends of the Earth Europe and for members of the Right to Energy coalition across Europe. They pioneer in holding fossil fuel corps accountable and organise organically from the ground up. They have enlightened us on some of the key issues for energy poor households, and these issues such as fossil fuel lock ins and disconnections will be a bigger priority this year for us at FoEE.

Martha Myers, Climate justice and energy campaigner, Friends of the Earth Europe. Right to Energy coalition co-coordinator

HITTING THE HEADLINES

Fuel Poverty Action was mentioned over 2,700 times across online, broadcast and print media. We averaged 10 media appearances per week with FPA members and staff, and we put the media in touch with others in our networks who wanted to speak out about their personal struggles with fuel poverty.

The below is just a taste of our media presence. For a full list and analysis of our media presence see [here](#) and [here](#).

- 2700+ pieces of media coverage, including 2249 online, 376 broadcast, 62 print, and 78 blogs.
- Highlights include: Yahoo!, MSN, BBC, The Guardian, the Times of India, Bloomberg, Reuters, the Daily Mail, the Daily Mirror, the Daily Express, and the Independent.
- Number of countries reached: 58+ including the UK, the US, Australia, Canada, France, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore and South Africa.

TV

BBC News, Newsnight, BBC Politics London, BBC London regional news, Channel 5 News, GB News, Good Morning Britain, ITV News, ITV Yorkshire, Sky News, Scotland Tonight, Talk TV. Highlights include Ruth London "telling it like it is" with Jeremy Kyle, 26 August 2022.

Radio

Woman's Hour, LBC, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 5 Live, Liverpool Community Radio, Planet Radio, Talk Radio, Times Radio; BBC Radio Berkshire, Derby, Devon, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent, Lancashire, Leeds, Lincolnshire, London, Scotland, Solent, Sussex, Surrey, Three Counties. Highlights include Diane Skidmore with Rob Rinder, Talk Radio 6 May 2022.

National Press

Big Issue, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Financial Times, Guardian, Herald, Independent, iNews, Metro, Morning Star, Scottish Sun, The National, The Times, The Week. Highlights include a major feature on Energy For All by Polly Toynbee in the Guardian, and follow on article.

Regional Press

Aberdeen Press & Journal, Evening Standard, GlasgowLive, Glasgow Times, Ham&High, Kent Live, Lancaster Guardian, Inside Croydon, Lancashire Post, London World, Metro, Sheffield Star, Walthamstow Echo, Westmoreland Gazette.

Trade Press

Architects' Journal, CNBC, Current News, Energy Live News, Forbes Advisor, Green World, Inside Housing, Left Foot Forward, New Statesman, Nursing in Practice, Resilience, Simply Switch, Socialist Worker, This Is Money, Tribune, Utility Week.

Online blogs and newsletters

Brixton Buzz, Counterfire, Daily Motion, Devon Live,, Chronicle Live, CITY A.M, Dissident Island Radio, End Fuel Poverty Coalition, GIZMODO, Labour Hub, London News Online, National Pensioners Convention newsletter; National World, Open Democracy, PCS blog, Politics.co.uk, Swift Headline, Techno Trenz, Wembley Matters, XR.

International

Al Jazeera, Bloomberg, enca (South Africa), Euronews, Reuters, Agence France Presse, RFI and TV5 Monde (France), Japan, The Segye Ilbo(Korea), Netherlands, Channels TV (Nigeria), South Africa, Sweden, West Australian.



The Times 4 January 2022

"We say 'System Change, Not Climate Change!' Fuel Poverty Action's campaigning to protect people from fuel poverty and challenge the fossil fuel industry is a great example of this, and is more important now than ever."

Claire James, Campaigns Coordinator, Campaign Against Climate Change

THROUGH THE COURTS

Fuel Poverty Action and two individuals filed a case against energy regulator Ofgem in the High Court, with the support of the Good Law Project. This challenged the extortionate rise to the energy price cap. Now that the government’s energy price guarantee has reduced the impact of Ofgem’s shocking decision, the Good Law Project is reconsidering where to go with the legal process. But Ofgem has to be held to account.



Diane Skidmore at Winter Deaths protest
26 Nov 2021

“It is beyond outrageous that on top of the horrendous price rises we are all facing, people have to deal with suppliers’ refusal to even fulfil their customer service obligations.”

Ruth London quoted in **Open Democracy** expose of Ofgem, 27 Sept 2022

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

FPA was invited to speak at a huge number of events, meetings, conferences, rallies and roundtables including:

Unison conference fringe, PCS conference fringe, Right to Energy Coalition annual forum, Momentum Wandsworth Climate Crisis meeting, Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC), TUC LESE Pensioners’ Network, annual conference of Divas (women in District Heating), Insulate Britain campaign meetings, European Summer University of Social Movements in Germany, Homes UK – The Future of Living event in the Excel Centre, two London Tenants Federation conferences, Community Energy London meetings, Climate Emergency Centres, Tower Hamlets Cooperative Party.

We took an active part in Ofgem stakeholder events and in meetings organised by The Heat Trust and by Divas.

We spoke twice at Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group’s two-part autumn 2022 conference, in September as keynote speaker in the session titled 'Joining the Dots: a session to discuss how our struggles link up...', and again in October. We led on buildings and energy at a Lambeth Council roundtable on how to implement their climate action plan.

We also helped organise and spoke at four demonstrations in Westminster, and spoke at a rally outside Shell’s AGM and at an Extinction Rebellion rally in Whitehall.



Ruth London at e4a rally 19 Oct 2022
© Angela Christofilou

WHAT A YEAR!

ONE CRISIS

Summer 2021 saw the start of the meteoric rise in energy prices that has driven many people to destitution. By the time we started our new year in the autumn, people were already crying out in pain. As well as the price rises, we were still suffering from the pandemic and its effects, but furlough payments were ending, and the Universal Credit uplift on which many people depended had been removed. As winter 2021-22 loomed many people were already asking if they would make it through to spring. At the same time, energy companies were reporting record profits.

At COP 26, thanks to heroic efforts of grassroots organisations and some outspoken governments of vulnerable nations, we heard a lot about the effects of climate change on life and standards of living in the global south and far north. But it is startling how little was said about the connection between climate change and our standard of living here in Britain, let alone about the role of Big Oil in determining both.



In November, the Office for National Statistics released the annual update on “excess winter deaths”, one third of which are estimated to be due to cold homes, although the statistics were confused due to Covid.

Hundreds turned out at our rally with the National Pensioners Convention in Westminster to mark the deaths due to fuel poverty in 2020-21. The rally was supported by MPs and Peers and received extensive press coverage

At the end of the event, we handed in at Downing Street and read out another letter to the Prime Minister proclaiming, We will not forgive you.



NPC and FPA winter deaths protest 26 Nov 2022

OUR DILEMMA – OVER A BARREL

As the energy crisis deepened, everyone began to look for solutions.

Suggestions included moving social and environmental levies from energy bills to taxation; removing VAT from energy; discounts or price reductions for people on benefits i.e. “social tariffs”; one off flat rate payments – universal or to benefits recipients, or to people in lower tax bands; Government loans or payments to suppliers so they can avoid raising prices. The industry wanted the government to pick up the tab by underwriting price caps on their product, and this was supported by many others.

Some approaches, such as redistributing wealth to people on low incomes, would help those who only put on their heating for half an hour a day. Other approaches, like the demands for removal of VAT from fuel, and demands for a state-sponsored energy price cap, would give the greatest benefit to the rich.

Underlying all this was a serious tension. People were demanding financial support, but financial support meant subsidising fossil fuels, because that’s what most people were using in their homes. The unintended consequence of this would be to accelerate climate change. While there is much wider acceptance that climate change and poverty are “one crisis”, on the ground people are still being told that “going green” is a luxury, and “unaffordable”. And solutions must meet the test of this dilemma: how to tackle both fuel poverty and the climate crisis at the same time.

Fuel Poverty Action outlined two major criteria, that we were pleased to see acknowledged as our work and widely applied in Europe.

- a) Does it mean transferring even more public money to the fossil fuel industry – and
- b) Who does it give more money to – people at the bottom of society, or people at the top? Is it progressive or regressive in terms of income transfer? Including internationally, if there are repercussions for people in other countries.

In my time here I think watching FPA's passion and commitment has been one of my biggest inspirations and learning experiences.

Martha Myers on leaving FoE Europe where she coordinated R2E



Energy Bill of Rights outside British Gas AGM 2016



On Westminster Bridge
1 Oct 2022

OUR WAY FORWARD – ENERGY FOR ALL

Our proposal was for each household to receive – free – enough energy to cover the basics, like heating, lighting, cooking, and connectivity. “Energy For All” can be paid for by higher tariffs on use that goes beyond basic needs, by windfall taxes and by ending the millions of pounds spent daily on fossil fuel subsidies.

The idea is that the amount each household receives would be determined by need – taking account of the fact that some of us need more because of our health, age, or housing conditions. This, we believe, will offer the security that is now so desperately needed, and will also strongly incentivise government moves to insulate homes, switch to cheaper, renewable energy, and improve heating systems.

“Every family deserves access to affordable, clean energy. But the way we get billed today means that basic energy needs are charged at the same rate as extravagant use.

“We need a new approach that gives everyone a free energy allowance for basic needs like heating, cooking and lighting. But when people are powering luxury lifestyles, like heating a private swimming pool, they should expect to pay a higher rate.

“The government should also put a much higher windfall tax on oil and gas profits. This will help stop profiteering and it will raise revenue that can shield households from the cost of interventions to keep bills down.”

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady

The strength of ‘Energy For All’ is that it is universal and targeted at the same time. It avoids the degradation and injustices of means testing, but those who can afford to be profligate with energy would end up paying more. It will stop anyone freezing but will not lead to increased investment in the fuels that are threatening to fry us all.

The higher price for those who can afford to use more than they need will encourage energy efficiency and help to cut carbon emissions.

Many people are concerned about the waste of energy, as well as climate campaigners. For example, older people who are used to conserving everything and residents on District Heating estates who watch their neighbours’ heat flying out from open windows.

Funding the free energy partly by stopping the flow of money to the fossil fuel giants is not an optional extra, but a necessary part of the plan.

FPA launched a change.org petition for Energy For All in February 2022, and in 24 hours, there were nearly 150,000 signatories.

It was, however, apparent that a change like Energy For All would not come quickly. We looked for stepping stones – ways that we could make a difference, going part way towards our solution.

UPSIDE DOWN

Standing charges

With energy prices soaring overall, Ofgem decided to significantly increase the standing charge part of our bills.

Ofgem is a regulator whose remit is 'to protect the interests of existing and future consumers', and it 'must have regard to the interests of individuals who are disabled or chronically sick, of pensionable age, with low incomes, or residing in rural areas'.

Last autumn, some UK suppliers were failing and the customers of failed firms were switched automatically to the remaining, larger suppliers, returning us to something close to the old "Big Six" situation. This made a mockery of years of propaganda telling us that the solution to high prices was to "Switch".

The companies receiving this bonanza of new business didn't inherit the credit held by the failing companies but they did inherit the unpaid bills. For this they were compensated by the government – but the cost was set to be borne by bill payers everywhere, with a huge levy on our bills. And that levy was allocated to the standing charge.

For people who can only afford to heat their homes for an hour a day, or, in some cases not at all, the standing charge is a huge and unaffordable imposition. People on prepayment meters who use no power for a week get a massive demand from their meter which must be met before they can put the lights on. It is the standing charge that creates the perverse situation where people who use the least energy pay the most per kWh and those who use more energy, pay less for it.

This scandal was flagged up publicly by Ideal Economics and featured in the Financial Times. All sorts of people – not habitual campaigners but angry individuals – began to write to FPA about it. We soon formed a working group to campaign, first, for a reduction in standing charges - and removal of the "Supplier of Last Resort" costs - and then for an end to standing charges altogether.

We thought this would be a small start in reversing the upside-down nature of our billing system, and something we could win. We wrote to Ofgem (getting good media coverage) and initiated a letter writing campaign which saw 1300 people writing to Ofgem about it.

Ofgem's argument was that there isn't an exact correlation between low incomes and low use of

energy – in fact, considerable numbers of people on low incomes are forced to use a lot, whether due to bad housing, or, for example, health imperatives and disability aids. This is true, and the solution to this dilemma is Energy For All, which starts with need. But the solution is not an upside down pricing system that leaves many people paying heavy charges while using hardly any energy at all.

Despite winning support from many quarters, Ofgem said they carefully considered the question and ruled out our proposed change to charging.



Prepayment. Photo: Tina Smith

PREPAYMENT METERS (OR "PAY AS YOU GO")

Many people on low incomes have chosen to use a prepayment meter (PPM) and pay in advance as a means of budgeting.

Increasingly, however, with the gas price crisis, people are being forced onto prepayment against their will by their suppliers when they go into debt.

In theory, the supplier must get a court warrant to enter and install a prepayment meter, which will only be granted if it is safe and practical for the user. If you have a smart meter, the same conditions apply but the switch can be made remotely. In practice, thousands of people are now being switched over, without a proper court hearing and often without even notifying the customer. This has put some older or disabled people in real danger.

FPA raised a question on this issue at an Ofgem stakeholder meeting in August. Ofgem said they "should put something out on compliance" with regulations, and were "considering" a ban on warrants.

Energy For All would make prepayment redundant. But in the meantime we are trying to get a ban on forced installations, and establish that, like water, heat and light are basic rights.

HOUSING, HEATING, AND THE POVERTY PREMIUM

Two of the ways in which people on low incomes are disadvantaged by the energy system are the state of housing and the lack of insulation. It is generally poorer people who live in poorer housing.

In May 2022 a legal challenge by Friends of the Earth forced the government to carry out an equalities assessment on its energy efficiency policy. Research found people of colour twice as likely to be living in fuel poverty as white people, while areas identified by the government as having a high number of residents with disabilities are more likely to be rated in the worst category for fuel poverty. Many social housing tenants, including one of our own members, are in tower blocks left uninsulated following the Grenfell fire.

“We stand united for the people. This group have achieved UK status.”

Eddie Farrell, resident of Malus Court, Salford

People in uninsulated or poorly repaired buildings are not necessarily people who would expect to be in poverty: many of those suffering this way are leaseholders rather than tenants. But the cost of heating – and the on-costs of the cladding crisis – can easily leave them unable to pay their bills. The fight for a mass insulation programme has always been part of FPA’s work, inside and outside of coalitions, always insisting that this insulation must be non-flammable, non-toxic, done in consultation with residents, and must be accompanied by good ventilation to ensure it does not lead to damp and mould. This year, speaking at the Action on Empty Homes national day of action in October 2021, we also put forward the idea that owners of homes left empty should be required to undertake a deep retrofit.

“Fuel Poverty Action’s campaigning has drawn attention to the need to retrofit houses that stand empty and could be warm and genuinely affordable homes for those on low incomes.”

Will McMahon, Director, Action on Empty Homes



Pendleton estate, Salford, still no sign of cladding.
Photo: ITV News

These warm homes could then be made available as refuges while other homes are retrofitted. The proposal has prompted considerable interest.

Another part of our core work is work on heating systems. Ironically, while the crisis has been caused by the soaring cost of gas, many people without gas boilers have been disproportionately affected. This includes people on heat networks, or “District Heating”, who have long been part of FPA’s wide periphery. This year we have fed in – and helped affected residents feed in – to a major Heat Trust consultation process. The consultation will affect compensation for heat network failures in the coming legislation on District Heating. We aim to ensure compensation is sufficient to help prevent such failures being commonplace. We also contributed to the national conference of Divas – a useful exchange point for women working in the District Heating industry. We have continued to put residents from affected estates and developments in touch with the relevant government department, BEIS, we have offered advice to residents associations, and we have used the media to help challenge the appalling omission of heat network users from the protections of the Energy Price Guarantee. Often put forward as a green solution, District Heating must offer reliable, affordable heat if it is to fulfil that promise.

“Just knowing there is someone out there who actually listens to affected residents is amazing in itself as complaints about faulty systems and high charges tend not to be heard, all too often - we don’t even have a regulator.”

Philippa Marks, residents service charges lead, The Exchange, Southwark



Surviving Storm Arwen

Besides the costs of poor housing, the energy pricing system itself is discriminatory. People who pay when a bill appears pay more than those who can pay by direct debit – despite the fact that they often choose this method because direct debits are risky when a bank balance is low. People who are working two or three jobs, caring for children or relatives, or living in overcrowded housing, may not have the luxury of responding to “time of use” incentives that offer lower prices to those with more flexibility in their lives. People who cannot afford efficient appliances, or even to replace old, energy guzzling boilers, cookers, washing machines or electric heaters, pay yet another poverty premium.

Besides our ongoing work on District Heating we have also started to bring together users of electric heating. The price of electricity is tied to the price of gas, despite the fact that much of it is now produced by renewables, and heating with electricity – unless you have a heat pump – can work out three times as expensive. People using off peak electricity with storage heaters, in homes not on the gas grid, miss out on the incentives designed to reward more comfortable customers for using power off peak. Again, we have started to support people in this situation. We also supported rural electricity users (whose primary heat source was oil) when the Northern Powergrid’s response to Storm Arwen left them in the dark and cold.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT: SUING OFGEM WITH THE GOOD LAW PROJECT

Aside from all these specific ways in which people at the bottom of the economic pile are further disadvantaged in energy pricing, it is also a fact that an increase in prices has a very different effect if you are already at the edge of debt, financial disaster, or hunger. People on low incomes, in addition, spend a much higher proportion of their resources on essentials like food and energy.

In September Fuel Poverty Action and two individuals filed a case against energy regulator Ofgem in the High Court, with the support of the Good Law Project. In August Ofgem had announced an extortionate rise to the energy price cap, allowing average bills to increase by 80% to a massive £3,549. Ofgem has consistently acted for the energy industry, instead of the consumers they’re supposed to be protecting. The case challenged the regulator on its failure to assess the impact of the price cap decision and the disproportionate effect on older people, people with disabilities, and children. Now that the government’s energy price guarantee has reduced the impact of Ofgem’s shocking decision, we are considering where to go with the legal process, but Ofgem has to be held to account.

“DPAC supports Fuel Poverty Action’s “Energy For All” proposal, it’s a vital measure for the safety and wellbeing of disabled and older people in poverty. There are disabled people who use dialysis machines, ventilators, need to charge power wheelchairs, need the fridge to keep certain medications refrigerated, who are rationing electricity because they cannot afford to charge their equipment to keep them going every day. People in social care and in energy debt with bailiffs at their doors demanding payment. Disabled people are in a terrifying position, barely surviving or dying.”

Paula Peters, Disabled People Against Cuts

COALITIONS COALESCE

As the cost-of-living crisis deepened, new coalitions were formed, and FPA greatly strengthened its connections with a number of networks and organisations.

Warm This Winter builds on the successful Windfall Tax Coalition and brings together dozens of experienced organisers from a diverse range of organisations – some focused on poverty and some on energy and the climate emergency.

Several organisations contacted us to ask for our opinion on the Don't Pay initiative, the mass movement aiming for a million people to together cancel direct debits paying their energy bills. We publicly supported the tactic (with safeguards) and applauded the huge mobilisation. However we also pressed for more attention to be paid to choosing demands. Liz Truss's price cap with its phenomenal unconditional give-away to the fossil fuel industry underlined the importance of our warning: Be careful what you wish for!

FPA joined with Just Stop Oil, taking part in some demonstrations. Just Stop Oil was an early endorser of Energy For All and we in turn appreciated their readiness to put their safety and their freedom on the line. The situation is so desperate, both economically, and in terms of the climate and the future we are facing, that direct action is inescapable, even at the risk of causing serious inconvenience or loss to some members of the public. Business as usual is simply not an option.

"Fuel Poverty Action is doing a really great job of an important role - bridging the gap between the more radical and moderate flanks of activism, by engaging with groups and organisations with very varying methods and internal cultures. They are very explicitly drawing the links between the climate crisis and cost of living crisis and demanding solutions that address both, creating a very reasonable and importantly – a very relatable – argument."

Bruce, Just Stop Oil

Meanwhile, friends at Extinction Rebellion made banners for us in their "factory", and FPA spoke to hundreds encamped outside Downing St about Energy For All. The response was fantastic and it looked like unanimous jazz hands when we asked at the end whether XR nationally should be signing up to support Energy For All.

We held a series of discussions with Friends of the Earth, New Economics Foundation and the TUC about Energy For All. Some modelling and number crunching began to see how our concept might work in practice.

"Fuel Poverty Action have been important partners over the past year, providing valuable contributions as we developed our Warm Homes campaign. We value their insight and perspective on the lived experiences of fuel poverty."

**Tony Bosworth, Energy campaigner,
Friends of the Earth**

We have developed closer links with Greenpeace. On the same day that Rishi Sunak took over as leader of the Conservative Party, FPA took part in a sit-in organised by Greenpeace in the lobby of the Houses of Parliament.

"Fuel Poverty Action are a phenomenal campaigning force with a big commitment to collaboration, and are growing in power and size at an exciting pace."

Georgia Whitaker Greenpeace UK

Many more organisations went to our website to sign up in support of Energy For All. A nationwide poll conducted by ICM found that three quarters of the population – 75% – support the right to free energy to meet people's basic needs. Only 10% opposed it. An even higher number – 81% – support abolition of the standing charge. Only 8% wanted this charge to stay.

19 OCTOBER: E4A RALLY & PETITION DELIVERY

On 19 October 2022, with all eyes on the resignation of Prime Minister Liz Truss, we delivered our petition to Downing Street. Remarkably, the rally was well attended by MPs and Lord Prem Sikka. A dozen MPs represented support from five parties. Three MPs spoke, and all listened to a huge range of allied organisations and grassroots supporters. The rally was followed by a lively march to Downing Street, and delivery of three boxes containing the signatures of 651,193 people.

“Fuel Poverty Action draws their influence from the grassroots. Their unique ability to directly support people who are struggling, tell truth to power and offer solutions at the same time, makes them a powerful campaigning force that this government underestimates at its peril.”

Clive Lewis, Labour Party MP for Norwich South

After the event, a number of people told us that its greatest strength was the wide and eclectic range of organisations, who were able to bring out the hidden effects of the gas price crisis on their own communities. What we built that day and in the run up to it has taken us miles further on the road towards building a groundswell, and winning Energy For All.

This autumn saw rapid-fire switches in energy price policy - first a price “guarantee” for all for two years, then a reduction to six months. This created a little relief but much more chaos and Liz Truss’s 45-day premiership brought the country to the brink of economic collapse.

Campaigns against fossil fuels and in defence of the climate have this year been much more integrated with campaigns against poverty, as well as with campaigns for well insulated housing, which have long made the climate connection.

Our biggest contributions may have been our call for windfall taxes and the Energy For All campaign; or it may have been our persistent, sometimes daily, presence in the media pointing out that the source of our increasing economic desperation is the fossil fuel giants that are sucking out the money that should go towards enabling everyone to both eat and heat our homes.



Organisations and networks we have worked with this year include:

- 350.org
- Action on Empty Homes
- Advice 4 Renters (Brent)
- All African Women’s Group
- Campaign Against Climate Change
- Campaign Collective
- Cazenove Labour Party
- Community Energy London
- Coppermill Heights Residents Association (Hale Village, Tottenham)
- Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)
- Divas (women in District Heating)
- Don’t Pay
- Dulwich and West Norwood (DAWN) Climate Change Coalition
- E3G
- English Collective of Prostitutes
- Extinction Rebellion
- Fossil Free London
- Friends of the Earth, UK
- Friends of the Earth, London
- Friends of the Earth, Lambeth
- Global Women’s Strike
- Good Law Project
- Greenpeace
- The Heat Trust
- Homes for All
- Inside Housing
- Insulate Britain
- Just Stop Oil
- Lambeth Council
- Lambeth Pensioners Action Group
- Lewisham Pensioners Forum
- London Tenants Federation
- Malus Tenants and Residents Association and Salford high-rise residents
- National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA)

- National Pensioners Convention (NPC)
- NEA
- Neon
- New Economics Foundation
- Newham Trades Council
- Oval Quarter Residents Association
- Parents For Future
- Pembroke Park Residents Association
- Peace and Justice Project
- Peoples Assembly
- Radical Housing Network
- Repowering London
- Resist and Renew
- RS21
- South East London Community Energy (SELCE)
- South West London Law Centres
- Single Mothers Self Defence
- Social Guarantee
- Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC)
- Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations
- Southwark Pensioners Action Group
- Sustainability First
- Tax Justice UK
- Uplift
- Tower Hamlets Cooperative Party
- Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI)

Trade Unions including:

- Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)
- CWU
- NUJ
- NUJ 60+
- PCS
- Unison
- Unite (Housing Workers Branch)
- TSSA
- TUSDAC
- TUC London East and South East
- TUC

Coalitions

- End Fuel Poverty Coalition
- Warm This Winter Coalition
- Windfall Tax Coalition

International

- Right to Energy Coalition
- Martha Myers and Kieran Pradeep, FOE Europe and Right to Energy Coalition coordinators
- Bram Cleays and Louise Sunderland, RAP
- Javier Tobias, ECODES
- Aurelie Ciuti, RWADE, Belgium
- Stefaan Reel, Belgium

We have also worked with

MPs, one Peer, Constituency Labour Parties, the Green Party, Residents of Pendleton Together in Salford; residents of district heating estates in Dorset, Eastcote, Haringey, Lambeth, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets; rural residents in Northumberland following Storm Arwen.

ABOUT US

THE CORE TEAM

Over the past year our volunteer work team has included the following people who have offered their time and commitment on a long-term basis. Many others have also been involved in the work more recently, or sporadically.

Ruth London, founding member of FPA, formed in 2011. A grandmother, active for five decades organising against poverty, discrimination and climate change, and against rape, she co-ordinates FPA's work. (Director)

Diane Skidmore joined FPA 2012. She is 72, mother of six, grandmother, activist, council tenant for 35 years; home-educated last four children so also educated many others on her estate. A retired NHS health trainer, she still works to support healthy living and well-being for all. (Director)

Frances Sleap has been involved with FPA since 2012. She teaches Philosophy to sixth form students, and can sometimes bring her concerns with peace building and climate justice to work. She has two small children. (Director)

Ellen Lebeth started liaising with FPA around 2014 on actions exposing the scandal of "excess winter deaths". With a long history of struggles in the UK and in South Africa, she is chair of Lambeth Pensioners Action Group. She is a Vice-President of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC). Within NPC she is also a member of the Executive Committee, Structure, London Region, Women's, and Housing Working Parties and chairs the NPC Minority Elders Committee. Since 2019 she has formally served as the NPC liaison with FPA. Ellen serves on the Greater London Forum BAME Committee.

Steve Burak In FPA since 2014, Steve has also been active in Climate Camp, Occupy LSX, Rising Up, Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, Greenpeace, Earthstrike, Disabled People Against Cuts, social housing groups, anti-racist and equality organisations – committed to a broad spectrum of the problems needing resolution. He often feeds in news from the many climate or housing-related meetings and demonstrations he takes part in.

Philip McMahon joined in 2017. He's a web developer at The Guardian newspaper. Outside of FPA, he's been active with Campaign Against Arms Trade for several years. He thinks retrofitting the UK's housing stock is an easy obvious win against climate change. (Director)

Frances Lobel works with Repowering London and Thinking Works and has closely studied what protections there are -- or could be -- for people who cannot afford to pay their bills or top up their meters. She is looking at the prohibition of domestic water supply disconnections, and the abolition of self-disconnection in the water sector, to consolidate arguments for similar prohibitions in the energy sector. She joined the crew in 2020.

Rhiannon Hughes - welfare rights campaigner. Became aware of FPA as a tenant and tenant campaigner and joined the core team in 2020. Now part of South West London Law Centres getting legal advice to south west Londoners as Community Engagement Manager. She says, "Within a broken welfare state legal advice isn't going far enough. There needs to be system change which we push for as part of FPA."

Graeme Langton lives in a Salford tower block and has fought hard for fire safety, restoration of insulation, care for residents' mental health, and many other pressing issues on his estate. Working with us for several years, he joined FPA in 2021 and contributes his experience and priorities to others.

Verena Beane says she "just gradually slipped into" FPA over the years, after first connecting with us through the NPC (National Pensioners Convention), where she is on the London Region Executive Committee. 2022 has seen her becoming more involved in the organisation of FPA as a whole. Her early career was teaching in Primary School followed by management in an Adult Education and Further Education College until her retirement. She was always a TU rep and a supporter of individuals' rights in the workplace. She is Secretary of her local Unison Retired Members branch and vice chair of region.

Gianluca Cavallaro-Ng, Alexa Waud, and Joana Westphal stood down as Directors this year. Our part time worker **Maddy Winters** has also now left FPA. We thank them all for their contributions.

NEW FPA STAFF

We're glad to introduce here our two new workers who started in September 2022 on the Energy For All campaign team:

Stuart Bretherton, Energy For All Campaign Co-ordinator

Previously active in direct action groups including Extinction Rebellion, Palestine Action and Living Rent, Scotland's Tenants Union. Worked in housing support in hometown of Paisley prior to joining FPA, but saw increasing difficulty with tenancy sustainment due to rising bills.

John Whitcher, Energy For All Campaigner: Union and Community Focus

Previously worked in education and youth support services however due to the greed of large companies and underfunding of public services he believes the solution is organising for systemic change with organisations such as Fuel Poverty Action. Prior to FPA he was involved as an organiser with groups such as ACORN renters union, Unite community and The World Transformed Festival.

Nancy Platts, of Campaign Collective, has stepped in on a freelance basis to help promote Energy For All in Parliament since the person originally appointed to this role was forced to resign for personal reasons. Nancy has wide experience of parliament and of campaigning on fuel poverty and other issues.



Prepayment meter and footstool.
Photo: Tina Smith.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want first of all to thank our funders, who are helping us grow to meet the current crisis:

- Blue Moon Trust
- Disrupt
- Energy Transition Fund (ETF)
- Necessity.info

Besides the conversations and cooperation on projects with people in many of the organisations cited above, we want to warmly thank the following organisations and individuals for generous support of many kinds. There have also been donations of some hundreds of pounds from some individuals who may not want to be named, but their support is warmly appreciated.

We thank:

Stuart Hodkinson for the proceeds from his groundbreaking book, *Safe as Houses, Private Greed, Political Negligence and Housing Policy after Grenfell*.

Beth Stratford for help with polls showing support for Energy For All.

Brenda Boardman for organising donations for us, and providing expert information and advice.

Campaign Against Climate Change and 350.org for the loan of equipment.

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) for working with us on so many campaigns and bringing crucial dimension to them.

Extinction Rebellion for making us beautiful banners.

Friends of the Earth and in particular Connor Schwartz for arranging help with social media and our website when we were unable to manage these, and Anna Gavurin and Sana Yusuf for providing this help.

Lord Prem Sikka for his constant supply of devastating facts and statistics.

Gary Jackson for his "Heating or Eating" song.

Reggae DJ Earl Gateshead, Studio 61, and Repowering London for a great benefit gig.

The Right to Energy Coalition for helping us access others on the Continent, circulating our views and materials and keeping us informed despite our remoteness since Brexit.

Southwark Unite, and Unite Housing Workers branch both gave generous donations.

Simon Francis of End Fuel Poverty Coalition who is consistently at our side.

Tax Justice UK for help with information.

Tipping Point for advice on our recruitment process.

Trade Unionists Sam Mason at PCS and Suz Muna at Unite Housing Workers Branch for constant support through the years, and Matthew Lay at Unison for his enthusiasm for Energy For All.

Uplift, and in particular Tessa Khan, Fiona Waters, Gabriel Davalos, and Tamasin Cave — for many different kinds of help.

The Warm This Winter Coalition for having our back when we have bitten off more than we could chew, and helping us out in numerous ways.



Rally, march and delivery of Energy For All petition, 19 October 2023. Photos by Angela Christofilou.

FUEL POVERTY ACTION

This Annual Report was produced by Ruth London
with the help of Nancy Platts and Amalric Pouzoulet