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James Dornan MSP
Convenor
Local Government and Communities Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
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30 August 2019

Dear James

Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy)(Scotland) Act 2019

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy)(Scotland) Act 2019. Following the unanimous support at Stage 3, this important piece of legislation received Royal Assent on 18 July. The Scottish Government has a strong track record on tackling fuel poverty and during the summer I took time to see the impact that our programmes have, hearing first-hand the difference that our fuel poverty schemes have in making people's homes warmer and cheaper to heat.

I am already moving forward with work to support the new legislation and as part of that I will be bringing forward various regulations under the Fuel Poverty Act. I made clear in my Committee appearance at Stage 2 that it was my intention to implement the substantive provisions of the Act as soon as possible. I am therefore delighted that I will be laying Commencement Regulations on 5 September. These will see the majority of the Act brought into force by 19 September.

As the Committee will be aware there are a number of elements that are not on the face of the Act that need to be in place to properly define and measure fuel poverty. The Committee agreed that these matters relating to the enhanced heating regimes and the remote rural, remote small town and island uplift should be set out in more detail in regulations.

A consultation on the households that should have an enhanced heating regime applied when calculating fuel poverty has just concluded. Following consideration of the responses and discussions to identify how the Scottish House Condition Survey can be amended I will be laying the Enhanced Heating Regulations in October 2019, putting another key element in place.

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I then intend to lay regulations under section 6(b) of the Fuel Poverty Act. These will define 'remote rural area', 'remote small town' and 'island' area and specify who will determine the uplifts for these areas. I am determined that this piece of work is robust and truly represents the additional costs faced by these communities. It is therefore important to align this work with the Minimum Income Standard. I am already progressing work on this and these regulations will be laid once we have secured an agreement with the specified person or organisation. I anticipate laying these in October or November 2019.

In December 2019 I will lay regulations relating to the new statutory Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel. Until the new statutory Panel is up and running I have asked Ann Loughrey, Chair of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel and Partnership Forum to continue with the current arrangements and I am pleased to say that she has agreed. I was particularly keen that we retained the expertise and knowledge that resides in the current Panel and Partnership Forum as we take forward work on developing the final Fuel Poverty Strategy.

I look forward to working with you and the wider Committee as I bring forward these regulations.

Kind regards

KEVIN STEWART

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