

24 November 2009

Tolson urges local householders to contact helpline for advice on fuel bills

Jim Tolson MSP for Dunfermline West is urging constituents who may be missing out on big savings on their energy bills this winter to contact the Home Heat Helpline (0800 33 66 99) for free advice and financial support.

Jim Tolson said: "I want to ensure people who may be worried about their fuel bills, particularly as the credit crunch continues to squeeze household budgets – that there is help and advice available. If anyone is uncertain whether or not they qualify, give the Home Heat Helpline a call. I also urge friends, relatives and neighbours to call the number on behalf of someone else who may be in fuel poverty.

It is estimated that around 4,500 household in the Dunfermline West constituency are missing out on big savings on their energy bills. Research published by the Helpline has indicated that contacting the hotline could result in families across West Fife slashing more than £250 from their energy bills every year."

Christine McGourty, the Home Heat Helpline spokesperson added: "There are free grants available via the hotline that could provide a lifeline for many people as it gets colder through the winter months. Our research shows the huge scale of unclaimed help that's out there on offer from energy suppliers. We have trained advisers who can help people across Fife get grants for insulation, special reduced tariffs as well as advice and support on how to keep warm and save money on bills."

For more information, ring the Home Heat Helpline on **0800 33 66 99** or log on to www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

ENDS

Notes to editor

Research has been carried out by independent think tank, the New Policy Institute (NPI), highlighting low income households claiming either out-of-work or disability benefits, working tax credit or pension credit, who could benefit from the insulation grants.

The NPI research pinpoints where the Missing Millions are located up and down the country, enabling the Home Heat Helpline to see precisely which communities are most likely to gain from the assistance on offer. Across Great Britain, 3.6 million households are eligible for grants. According to the research, the Top Ten communities most likely to benefit nationwide if they pick up the phone are:

- The Home Heat Helpline operates from Monday to Friday 9am-8pm and from 10am-2pm on Saturday.
- The Home Heat Helpline is a free number – 0800 33 66 99 – providing vulnerable customers with a direct link to specialist teams at their energy supplier, who can deliver one or more of the following services:
 - a. The Priority Service Register which provides extra services for people who are elderly or disabled including bills in large text or Braille, security passwords and an annual gas safety check
 - b. Grants for free home insulation
 - c. Flexible payment options for customers in fuel debt
 - d. Benefits entitlement checks
 - e. A disconnection safety net which means that vulnerable customers will not be cut off even if they are unable to pay their bill
- The Home Heat Helpline is managed by the Energy Retail Association and paid for by contributions from Britain's major energy suppliers – see below.
- The Energy Retail Association (ERA), formed in 2003, represents the major electricity and gas suppliers in the domestic market in Great Britain. All the main energy suppliers operating in the residen-

tial market in Great Britain are members of the association - British Gas, EDF Energy, E.ON, npower, Scottish Power, and Scottish and Southern Energy.

- One call to the Home heat Helpline can provide:
 - direct support through access to reduced energy tariffs
 - access to grants for free home insulation
 - Information about flexible payment options ensuring vulnerable customers will not be cut off even if they are unable to pay their bill
 - Access to the Priority Service Register for people with disabilities or other health problems.
- The Home Heat Helpline has received support from Help the Aged; Age Concern; Citizen's Advice; Energy Action Scotland; Energy Saving Trust; Counsel and Care and One Parent Families Scotland/ Gingerbread. As part of its winter campaign, the stepped-up service will also allow worried householders or their relatives, friends and carers to make their enquiry over the internet at www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

For further information, photos or to arrange an interview with a spokesperson for the Home Heat Helpline, please contact: Barry McPherson on 07824 638 457 or barry.mcpherson@bigpartnerhsip.co.uk