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## New strategic working group to help tackle fuel poverty

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A short life Strategic Working Group will be set up to help the on-going efforts to tackle fuel poverty, Social Justice Secretary Alex Neil has announced today.

The Cabinet Secretary told the Fuel Poverty Forum that David Sigsworth, chair of the Forum, will chair the new group, which will work together with the Scottish Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force and the Forum to drive forward the elimination of fuel poverty.

The Strategic Working Group will be time limited and will report to Ministers in a year. The Group will, among other things, look at how new powers being devolved to Scotland can be best deployed to improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty.

As a result of taking up the position as chair of the new working group, David Sigsworth will step down as chair of the Fuel Poverty Forum to direct his full attention to the new group. Alan Ferguson, chair of the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland, will take up the role as the new chair of the Fuel Poverty Forum.

Mr Neil said:

“The Scottish Government is committed to eradicating fuel poverty and ensuring everyone in Scotland lives in a warm home that is affordable to heat. For that reason we are now designating energy efficiency as a National Infrastructure Priority.

“We recognise that increasing energy efficiency is the most sustainable way to reduce people’s fuel bills. We also recognise the scale of the challenge before us – this working group will provide strategic input to the development of Scottish Government energy efficiency policy, which will build on our efforts to date and see how we can go further.

“I would like to thank David for his achievements in chairing the Forum over the last four years, providing valuable advice and support to myself and Ministerial colleagues, not least in contributing to the development of our Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland. I know David will

contribute a lot in chairing the strategic working group and I look forward to working with him and with the new Chair Alan Ferguson in tackling fuel poverty.”

The news comes following the announcement of Warmer Homes Scotland, a new energy efficiency scheme worth up to £224m over the maximum 7 years of the contract.

The scheme, which will help as many as 28,000 Scots heat their homes, will install measures like insulation, heating and domestic renewables in households identified as fuel poor. Those in rural and island areas will be offered the same service as those in easier to reach parts of Scotland.

Mr Sigsworth said:

“I am pleased the Scottish Government is seeking independent advice on shaping fuel poverty interests in the development of the forthcoming Scottish Energy Efficiency Programme, and to inform the use of devolved powers to the maximum benefit of the people of Scotland.

“I welcome the chance to lead the group to undertake that task. I have enjoyed my past involvement with the Scottish Fuel Poverty Forum and wish Alan Ferguson well in taking over the Chair’s role.”

Mr Ferguson said:

“I am delighted to take up the position of Chair of the Fuel Poverty Forum. The previous chair, David Sigsworth, will be a hard act to follow but I am determined to do my utmost in taking the Forum forward.

“Fuel poverty is a major issue affecting a huge proportion of people in Scotland. We must be ambitious and do all we can to eradicate it – and the Forum can play a key role in both helping Government but also holding it to account.”

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