

UK government must protect residents against “feudalistic” heating

Leith Walk Ward is home to the most densely populated neighbourhood in Scotland. If we are serious about promoting urban living, then one of the first things we can do as a society is free our most vulnerable residents from unfair heating charges.

Imagine, for the property you rent, being charged around £412 a year to have an active gas connection for your central heating before using a drop of gas.

Now imagine that you are forbidden from changing supplier.

That is exactly what a number of my constituents living in Leith Walk ward, in the north east of the city, are going through as they live in buildings with shared District Heating Systems.

District Heating Systems themselves were designed for noble reasons; to reduce the waste from individual boilers and ensure a level of reliability that individual boilers can't provide. But for many of my residents, they've become anti-consumer cages where feudalistic homage must be paid rather than having individual choice. Or indeed even choose to reduce

your usage to save money.

Utility prices are a scandal across the country and it's hitting many of the most vulnerable. It's why Lib Dem colleagues across the UK are continuing to call for green infrastructure, a one-off windfall tax on oil and gas giants, and have voted against cuts to the Winter Fuel Allowance.

While the [Edinburgh Reporter and others have previously highlighted](#) the plight of residents [trapped in this system in other parts of the city](#), we are approaching another harsh winter without clear government action.

One group of residents who've notified me of this live just off Leith Walk in social-rent housing. Another building with this system is retirement housing near Easter Road. Both buildings contain a number of vulnerable individuals who are hit hardest by these charges, especially after recent UK government belt-tightening for pensioners.

While the regional average sits around 30p, one resident who approached me is being charged an eye watering £1.13 a day for gas they're not using.

Having your gas standing charge sitting at around 70% higher than the southern Scotland average is not justifiable. As some landlords, factors, local authorities and providers pass the issue around and eventually blame 'market conditions', it's clear that the government are long overdue in standing up for these individuals by ensuring they have a fair choice and liberty in the how they use, or not use, utilities – and find ways to ensure District Heating Systems get at least price parity with other models so their true potential can be met. We can't afford to penalise people who are using more sustainable forms of energy.

Lastly, we cannot understate the importance of receiving the welfare you are entitled to. Edinburgh residents are estimated to underclaim benefits they're entitled to, so please do not

hesitate in contacting advice services or representatives, such as the Council's own Advice Shop. You wouldn't be bothering anyone or villainised for asking.



Cllr Jack Caldwell who represents the Leith Walk Ward PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter