

News from the Scottish Labour Party in the Highlands and Islands

Highland Pensioners face red tape to access heating

19 June 2008

Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands MSP, is calling for answers on what is going to happen to pensioners across the Highlands and Islands seeking help with heating.

Following the scrapping by the Scottish Government of the system which gave the elderly free central heating Mrs Grant wants to know how these people will be dealt with in future.

"At the end of April there were 1,457 people in our area on the list. Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon said they could all expect to get heating. However, she said installing heating systems for our elderly wasn't reaching the fuel poor and that in future there would be conditions attached."

The MSP is concerned about how those who need help this winter will apply and how these applications will be dealt with.

Mrs Grant said: "Currently we have a transparent system which measures progress against how many people are waiting.

"My fear is that with the changes to this system there will be a hidden waiting list of elderly people seeking help – and indeed many more people who will be turned away.

"Over the past three years we have seen an average of 1,648 households benefit from this scheme in our area each year.

"It will have made a huge difference to the pensioners previously living in homes with inadequate heating.

"We are seeing a constant eroding of services for our elderly and vulnerable which has to be stopped.

"Measures dressed up as good news stories don't stand up to scrutiny – real term cuts to the NHS in the Highlands, cuts to services for the vulnerable in our communities and over the past week fears over SNP plans for pensioners' bus passes."

"The government has said that priority will still be given to pensioners who do not have a heating system in place.

"But for those with faulty heating systems it appears there are a range of conditions being introduced.

"If a pensioner's heating doesn't work should it matter if you are under 80 or over 80?

"I have asked the Scottish Government questions on how it plans to prioritise people who have no heating or faulty heating and if it is taking into account specific circumstances for instance those suffering chronic illnesses like asthma or diabetes."

web links :

Peter Peacock : www.peterpeacock.org.uk

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