

Task 1

This question is based upon language paper 2 question 4.

Read the following two sources:

Source A:

First food banks, now bedding banks: in my time in politics, this is the worst poverty I've seen

[Gordon Brown](#)

“Bedding banks” are about to take their place alongside food banks, baby banks and children’s clothes banks as the new face of charity. Parents unable to afford their heating bills are now turning to blankets, sheets, duvet covers and sleeping bags for their children as their cheapest available protection against the cold winter nights. All because, no matter how prudently they budget, families do not have the cash to feed their prepayment gas and electric meters – it is an 18th-century answer despite there being a 21st-century solution.

In all my time in politics I have never witnessed so much poverty and hardship. In Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, the constituency I grew up in and represented for 32 years and where I am patron of the [local family centre](#), there are more children than ever going to school ill-clad and hungry; desperate mothers falling into the hands of loan sharks; and [mental health problems escalating](#) with little NHS provision to cope.

A few weeks ago hundreds of anxious mothers queued up outside their local Co-ops after the family centre staff raised funds to add a £50 credit to their gas and electricity prepayment cards.

This is poverty at its demeaning and degrading worst. Even before the April energy price rises, I am hearing stories I thought I would never hear in 2022: of children obsessively checking the electricity meter when they wake up in the bitter cold; of families who can only turn on their heating for two hours a day and use torches at night rather than spending on electric light; and of mothers unable to hide their tears when they cannot provide their children with either winter clothes and shoes or basic warmth.

Source B

Energy bills: 'Trapped in a home I couldn't heat'

A university student whose Belfast flat was so damp the ceiling plaster fell away in "mouldy chunks" said she felt trapped in a home that was too expensive to keep warm.

Niamh Oddy said she opted to switch off the heat after she and her flatmate lost their jobs due to Covid-19.

And then the damp set in.

In England and Wales, private properties must meet [a minimum energy efficiency standard](#), with the aim that renters can afford to heat them.

There are currently no such restrictions in Northern Ireland.

A new bill is working its way through Stormont and will bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK.

The [Private Tenancies Bill](#) will set a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating, which will mean that homes cannot be let out if their energy efficiency rating is below an as yet undetermined point.

Organisations say this is key to tackling fuel poverty as [the cost of energy continues to rise](#).

The bill also includes a cap on rent increases to once in 12 months, amending and in some cases extending the notice to quit period which was introduced at the start of the pandemic, and limiting tenancy deposits to one month's rent.

'There was no escape'

Ms Oddy's flat had old electric storage heaters.

She said the dials were broken which meant she could not adjust the settings, so she switched the heaters off.

She told BBC News NI that the agent told them just to open the windows after the ceilings and walls grew mould.

- [How can renters make their homes warmer and greener?](#)

Ms Oddy, who is studying for her master's degree at Queen's University, said: "The ceiling became really damp and then the plaster started peeling off and it would just fall away in really big chunks.

"We complained about this and nothing, so all our stuff was covered in white dust and just this grotty, mouldy plaster.

"It was really depressing. You really did feel like there was no escape. We were paying a good portion of our student loans to live there as well, we had both lost our jobs, we were just scraping by."

They moved out when their lease was up.

She said the rent on the property had since been increased from £580 to £600 a month.

"It was absolutely unliveable, and I do regret paying rent on it for so long."

