

Cross-Party Group Annual Report: Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

Date: 1 February 2021

Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

1. Group membership and office holders.

Chair:

Mark Isherwood MS

Members of the Senedd:

Mike Hedges MS

Vikki Howells MS

Llyr Gruffydd MS

Helen Mary Jones MS

Secretariat

Ben Saltmarsh (NEA Cymru), Head of NEA Cymru, National Energy Action (NEA) Cymru, Room 4E, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HA. Email: ben.saltmarsh@nea.org.uk. Tel. 029 2022 9322/ 07720591403. (Elected Secretary).

2. Previous Group Meetings since the last AGM.

Meeting 1.

Meeting date: 23 July 2020 (Online on Zoom)

Attendees:

Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)	Simon Lannon , Cardiff University
Michael Anderson , Ofgem	Fflur Lawton , Smart Energy GB
Sumina Azam , Public Health Wales	Michelle Lewis , Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Stephen Chamberlain , Welsh Government	Cheryl Martin , Children in Wales
Matt Copeland , NEA	Juliet Morris , Care & Repair Cymru
Jonathan Cosson , Warm Wales	Mike Potter , NEA
Ceri Cryer , Age Cymru	Bethan Proctor , Community Housing Cymru
Phil Dawson , E.ON	Daniel Roberts , Ofgem
Steffan Evans , Bevan Foundation	Ben Saltmarsh , NEA Cymru
Brian Hart , NEA	Adam Scorer , NEA
Mike Hedges MS	Joanna Seymour , Warm Wales
Sam Hughes , Citizens Advice	Tim Thomas , NRLA
Sion Jones , Welsh Parliament	Jack Wilkinson-Dix , Energy Saving Trust
Tudur Jones , Welsh Government	Nigel Winnan , Wales & West Utilities
George Jones , Older People's Commissioner for Wales	
Crispin Jones , Arben Am Byth	

Summary of issues discussed:

Focus:

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a significant impact on household finances, especially for those that already struggle with the costs of essential services. As we continue to work through the crisis and look towards winter, this meeting reflected on some of the immediate and emerging impacts of COVID-19 on fuel poor and at-risk households in Wales. It provided opportunity to share views and experiences and consider what could be done to help alleviate the pressures on those struggling to keep warm and healthy.

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of NEA Cymru presented on:

- early steps taken by the UK Government and energy industry to help protect consumers;
- emerging issues that have been identified and would need to be resolved ahead of a potential second lockdown;
- rising energy debt; *and*

- recent NEA policy papers, Call for Evidence and wider work on relevant issues (incl. the Welsh Government's forthcoming new fuel poverty plan for Wales).

Sam Hughes, Policy Researcher at Citizens Advice presented on:

- the emerging impacts Citizens Advice has identified through its work, including statistics on household income, debt, self-disconnection and self-rationing;
- the *Facing the Cliff Edge* survey in Wales; *and*
- a look ahead should there be continued issues and/or a second lockdown, including options around the Discretionary Assistance Fund and income maximisation.

Sumina Azam, Head of Policy at Public Health Wales (PHW) presented on:

- PHW's *Improving winter health and well-being and reducing winter pressures in Wales* report, focused on taking a preventative approach and aiming to inform strategic planning;
- Wales and the UK's high rate of Excess Winter Deaths;
- evidence-based interventions (including vaccinations through to energy efficiency improvements);
- rising emergency hospital admissions, which are highest in most deprived fifth of Wales' population;
- need for tackling poverty and poor housing; *and*
- a framework for action.

Stephen Chamberlain and Tudur Jones, from the Domestic Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty Branch at Welsh Government presented on:

- a status update on plans to consult on a new fuel poverty plan for Wales, delayed most recently in light of COVID-19;
- recent enhancements to the Discretionary Assistance Fund;
- update on the work of the Warm Homes Programme during lockdown, including the Nest Scheme Health Conditions Pilot;
- rising fuel poverty estimates;
- the Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry into fuel poverty and the Welsh Government's response;
- Ministerial engagement with BEIS on the Warm Home Discount; *and*
- energy advice and support services.

Questions were taken. The meeting concluded with the unopposed election of Ben Saltmarsh, Head of NEA Cymru as Group Secretary and a note regarding plans to meet again when the consultation on the new fuel poverty plan for Wales is open.

Meeting 2.

Meeting date: 25 January 2021 (Online on Zoom)

Attendees:

Michael Anderson (Ofgem), **Paula Burnell** (Dwr Cymru), **Jessica Cook** (NEA), **Matt Copeland** (NEA), **Phil Dawson** (E.ON), **Ryland Doyle** (Office of Mike Hedges MS), **Claire Durkin** (NEA), **Bethan Edwards** (Marie Curie), **Steffan Evans** (Bevan Foundation), **Brian Hart** (NEA), **Sam Hughes** (Citizens Advice), **Samantha James** (Dwr Cymru), **Adam Jones** (Public Health Wales), **Crispin Jones** (Arbed am Byth), **George Jones** (Older People's Commissioner for Wales), **Liz Lambert** (Cardiff Council), **Simon Lannon** (Cardiff University), **Fflur Lawton** (Smart Energy GB), **Simone Lowthe-Thomas** (Severn Wye Energy Agency), **Helen Parfitt** (Office of Helen Mary Jones MS), **Faye Patton** (Care & Repair Cymru), **Lee Phillips** (Money and Pensions Service), **Neville Rookes** (Welsh Local Government Association), **Bethan Proctor** (Community Housing Cymru), **Ben Saltmarsh** (Secretariat/NEA Cymru), **Adam Scorer** (NEA), **Ben Sears** (Welsh Local Government Association), **Dora Szalkay** (Office of Huw Irranca-Davies MS), **Gareth Thomas** (NEA Cymru), **Tim Thomas** (National Residential Landlords Association), **Jack Wilkinson-Dix** (Energy Saving Trust), **Nigel Winnan** (Wales & West Utilities)

Summary of issues discussed:

Focus:

This meeting focused on the Welsh Government's draft plans to tackle fuel poverty between now and 2035.

Following a three-month consultation, the meeting provided opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on their responses and share views on what needs to be done to best support people across Wales struggling in cold, leaky, unhealthy homes.

The meeting also included this year's AGM.

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of NEA Cymru presented:

- a summary of the Welsh Government's key proposals (in the absence of the Minister or Welsh Government officials who sent their apologies);

- NEA's views in response, focusing on:
 - targets – including calls for the Welsh Government to meet its statutory obligations to specify interim milestones;
 - actions – linked to 'Warm Homes Programme', 'Energy Advice and Support Services', 'Monitoring, evaluation and reporting', and 'Working with partners';
 - alignment with broader Government objectives – particularly public health and decarbonisation.

Sam Hughes, Policy Researcher at Citizens Advice presented on:

- Citizens Advice's response, focusing on:
 - targets – including need for interim milestones and statutory footing, EPC-target, and local level obligation;
 - key actions – linked to delivering fuel poverty support services, monitoring and evaluation, and areas outside direct Welsh Government powers;
 - additional suggested short-term actions – regarding the Warm Homes Programme, specific measures to support those in severe fuel poverty, the Discretionary Assistance Fund, ECO-Flex, and fuel poverty estimates;
 - new proposals – including concerns with the kWh measure and 'under 25s' proposals;
- concluding with a link to recent 'COVID-19, fuel poverty and Wales' statistics.

Dr Steffan Evans, Policy and Research Officer at The Bevan Foundation presented on:

- key reflections from The Bevan Foundation's response, including:
 - residual income measure of fuel poverty
 - what more can be done to focus on income and the cost of fuel (in addition to energy efficiency)
- results from a recent YouGov survey, relating to the impacts of the pandemic; *and*
- calls for a Welsh benefits system.

Adam Jones, Senior Policy Officer at Public Health Wales (PHW) presented on:

- a brief overview of PHW's response; *and*
- work currently being carried out by PHW on energy efficiency and health in Wales, due to highlight key evidence and recommendations for policy and future research.

Questions were taken.

Samantha James, MD Household Customer Services, and Paula Burnell, Vulnerable Customer Manager at Dwr Cymru Welsh Water presented on:

- current support for Welsh Water customers in vulnerable circumstances;
- the challenges facing customers through COVID and Welsh Water's response;
- overlap between water poverty and fuel poverty; *and*
- an industry overview, including the Consumer Council for Water's Affordability Review.

Questions were taken. The meeting concluded with this year's AGM, including the unopposed re-election of Mark Isherwood MS as Chair of the CPG and Ben Saltmarsh, Head of NEA Cymru as Group Secretary. It was agreed a short, succinct 'Legacy Report' will be produced for use after the Senedd elections, should this CPG or equivalent be re-established.

3. Professional lobbyists, voluntary organisations and charities with whom the Group has met during the preceding year.

Only as detailed above.

Annual Financial Statement.

Date: 1 February 2021

Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

Chair: Mark Isherwood MS

Secretariat:

Adam Scorer (NEA) Acting from 1 November 2019

Ben Saltmarsh (NEA Cymru) From 23 July 2020

Group's Expenses.	None.	£0.00
Costs of all goods.	No goods purchased.	£0.00
Benefits received by the group or individual Members from outside bodies.	No benefits received.	£0.00
Any secretariat or other support.	No financial support received. Secretariat provided by NEA Cymru.	£0.00
Services provided to the Group such as hospitality.		
N/A. Both meetings delivered online via Zoom.		
Date	Description and name of provider	Cost
		£0.00
Total cost		£0.00