

## Consultation response

### **Senedd Cymru: Equality and Social Justice Committee Fuel poverty and the Warm Homes Programme**

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry into Fuel poverty and the Warm Homes Programme.

Older people are the group most likely to suffer from fuel poverty, where having to spend a disproportionate amount on fuel takes money away from other essentials. A contributing factor is that older people tend to live in older, energy inefficient properties.

It is vitally important to ensure that our older population stays warm and well throughout the harsh winter months. With the expected rise in the energy price cap this April, additional financial support is needed for older people for their fuel bills. We believe Welsh Government's Winter Fuel Support Scheme should be extended to include older people in receipt of Pension Credit.

Many older people are anxious about the next few months with some already turning their heating down, during the coldest month of the year, to save a few pounds. While others are cutting back on their food shopping. Such measures can have a devastating impact on older people's long term health and well-being.

- **What are the main lessons learned from the Welsh Government's current Warm Homes Programme**

We welcome changes to the Nest eligibility criteria which means more people are eligible, including people with certain health conditions.

Age Cymru signposts people to the Nest scheme, and it is important that those people that contact Nest, but are found to be ineligible for the Nest scheme, are provided with information about any other assistance schemes that may be available, for example utility company schemes. Feedback that we have received from older people indicates that such information is not always provided by Nest. In our experience, people are not being given the details of any other schemes that can help. We hear of people who have contacted Nest but aren't aware of any other initiatives.

We receive calls from people after having been to Nest, saying we can advise them on other schemes. We would question why Nest isn't advising people on other schemes that are available.

We believe that there should be a person-centred, holistic approach to ensure that people are aware of all types of support available, and are provided with information about any other assistance schemes that may be available. A cross-referral arrangement would be able to help so many more people.

It is important that Welsh Government publishes an evaluation of the Warm Homes pilot scheme operating in Ceredigion and Gwynedd with reference as to how advice and support services should be provided in the future.

Another issue that has been raised with us regarding Nest is the maintenance/repair of Nest-installed boilers. We've heard from people who have contacted Nest when their Nest-installed boiler breaks down or is no longer efficient and have been told that they do not qualify for assistance as they've already received help from Nest, and are directed away for assistance.

- **How can the Welsh Government ensure that the next iteration of the Warm Homes Programme better aligns with its efforts to decarbonise Welsh housing?**

To tackle fuel poverty effectively, Welsh Government must provide updated estimates on fuel poverty. Furthermore, we believe it is essential that Welsh Government publishes interim targets in its Tackling Fuel Poverty Plan to benchmark and assess progress in tackling fuel poverty. These targets should be measurable and time-bound, and accompanied by a detailed delivery plan.

We believe it is important that Welsh Government's proposed actions to decarbonise homes must consider how fuel poor households can be supported to mitigate any risks that decarbonisation may present to low income and vulnerable households, for example, whether available grants will be sufficient to cover the costs associated with the proposed switch from gas boilers to low-carbon heat pumps for homeowners in Wales.<sup>1</sup>

We believe that Welsh Government should undertake equality impact assessments to ensure that low income and vulnerable households are not disproportionately affected financially by the decarbonisation of the existing housing stock, to ensure a fair transition for older consumers in the move towards net zero.

Older people have voiced concerns about the potential disruption caused by retrofit programmes, and also concerns about potential fraud/scams by rogue traders under the guise of retrofit and other decarbonisation initiatives. It is

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<sup>1</sup> BBC news (online) 19 October 2021. [Heat pump grants worth £5,000 to replace gas boilers not enough, say critics - BBC News](#)

important that older people are protected against potential fraud, and it has been suggested that a regularly refreshed public information service is needed, preferably over TV and radio.

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