

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

Date: 11 December 2023

Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

1. Group membership and office holders.

Chair:

Mark Isherwood MS

Members of the Senedd:

Jane Dodds MS

Janet Finch-Saunders MS

John Griffiths MS

Mike Hedges MS

Sioned Williams MS

Vikki Howells MS

Secretariat

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of Wales, National Energy Action

Email: ben.saltmarsh@nea.org.uk.

2. Previous Group Meetings since the last AGM.

Meeting 1.

Meeting date: 13 February 2023 (Online on Zoom)

Attendees:

Mark Isherwood MS (Chair of the CPG), **Ben Saltmarsh** (Secretariat, NEA), **Sioned Williams MS**, **Helen Boggis** (on behalf of Vikki Howells MS), **Michael Potter** (NEA), **Maya Fitchett** (NEA), **Matt Copeland** (NEA), **Claire Durkin** (NEA Trustee), **Julie James MS** (Minister for Climate Change), **Beth Taylor** (Senedd), **Ken Moon** (on behalf of Heledd Fychan MS), **Gavin Dick** (NRLA), **Meilyr Tomos** (Gwynedd Council), **Simon Lannon** (Cardiff University), **Elaine Robinson** (Cardiff University), **Joanne Patterson** (Cardiff University), **David Kirby** (CIOB), **Joanna Seymour** (Warm Wales), **Jonathon Cosson** (Warm Wales), **Jenny Russon** (MCS), **David Cowdrey** (MCS), **Claire Pearce-Crawford** (Melin Homes), **David Wallace** (Melin Homes), **Kate Gilmartin** (BHA), **Tim Thomas** (Property Mark), **Revd James Tout** (Church in Wales), **Faye Patton** (Care and Repair), **Jo Harry** (Care and Repair), **Becky Ricketts** (Care and Repair), **William Jones** (Citizens Advice), **Lindsey Kearton** (Citizens Advice), **Jack Wilkinson-Dix** (Energy Savings Trust), **Joseph Carter** (Asthma and Lung), **Llŷr Randles** (Cardiff Council), **Siôn Rockley** (Cardiff Council), **Bethan Sayed** (Climate Cymru), **Rupert Pigot** (Smart Energy GB), **Kate Lowther** (RCPsych), **Haf Elgar** (FOE Cymru), **Crispin Jones** (Gwerin Management), **Ceri Cryer** (Age Cymru), **Natasha Wynne** (Marie Curie), **Cerys Clark** (CIH), **Matt Dicks** (CIH), **Jim McKirdle** (WLGGA), **Bryony Haynes** (Community Housing Cymru), **Rebecca Brown** (Ofgem), **Nigel Winnan** (WWU), **Rob King** (Bevan Foundation), **Nina Ley** (Welsh Government), **Maureen Howell** (Welsh Government), **Sandy Hore-Ruthven** (Severn Wye), **Frazer Richards** (Welsh Government), **Tanya Wigfall** (Welsh Government)

Summary of issues discussed:

Focus:

Following a Statement in Plenary on ‘Improving the Energy Efficiency of Welsh Homes’, the Group was joined by the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, to discuss the Welsh Government’s plans for a new, national demand-led scheme for homes in fuel poverty. Other priorities in this area were also discussed.

The meeting also reflected on the ongoing energy crisis, with a specific focus on the prepayment meter scandal and its impact on fuel-poor households.

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of Wales at National Energy Action, gave a presentation on:

- impacts of the energy crisis on fuel-poor, low-income, and vulnerable households
- the need for long-term solutions to address the underlying causes of the crisis

- updates on the forced installation of prepayment meters.

Lindsey Kearton, Senior Policy Officer at Citizens Advice Cymru:

- Presented Citizen Advice Cymru's research *Kept in the Dark*, demonstrating the increasing number of people in Wales who cannot afford to top up their prepayment meters
- took questions from the Group

Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change:

- updated members on the Welsh Government's current priorities in this area, including
 - representations to the UK Government, energy suppliers and Ofgem around issues with prepayment meters
 - the Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP)
 - a new national demand-led scheme to replace Nest, focused on energy efficiency improvements to tackle fuel poverty
- took questions from the Group

The Reverend James Tout (on behalf of the Most Revd Andrew John, Archbishop of Wales and Bishop of Bangor, Church in Wales):

- presented on the Food & Fuel Campaign, which has three primary objectives:
 - to facilitate prayer
 - to send an open letter to supermarkets
 - to issue boxes of hygiene products
- took questions from the Group

Meeting 2.

Meeting date: 06 July 2023 (Online on Zoom)

Attendees:

Mark Isherwood MS (Chair of the CPG), **Ben Saltmarsh** (Secretariat, NEA), **Amanda Ellis** (Heledd Fychan MS), **Becky Ricketts** (Care and Repair Cymru), **Ben Coates** (Asthma and Lung UK), **Ceri Cryer** (Age Cymru), **Crispin Jones** (Gwerin Management), **David Kirby** (CIOB), **Gareth Phillips** (Welsh Government), **Cara Holmes** (Citizens Advice), **Haf Elgar** (Friends of the Earth Cymru), **Rachel Cupit** (Warm Wales), **Sam Ward** (Climate Cymru), **Jonathan Cosson** (Warm Wales), **Lee Phillips** (Money and Pension Service), **Llŷr Randles** (Cardiff Council), **Liz Lambert** (Cardiff Council), **Matt Copeland** (NEA), **Mike Potter** (NEA), **Steffan Evans** (Bevan Foundation), **Natasha Wynne** (Marie Curie), **Owen Thomas** (John Griffiths MS), **William Jones** (CAB), **Lindsey Kearton** (Citizens Advice Cymru), **Rhiannon Phillips** (Welsh Government), **Meilyr Thomas** (Gwynedd Council), **Julie James MS** (Minister for Climate Change)

Summary of issues discussed:

Focus:

This meeting focused on the Welsh Government's plans for the next iteration of the Warm Homes Programme, following the publication of its policy statement about the scheme and response to its consultation. The Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, joined the Group to present plans and to take questions from the Group. Following the prepayment meter scandal earlier in the year, the meeting focused on the latest developments in this area and further reflected on the ongoing energy crisis.

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of Wales at National Energy Action:

- provided an update on the energy crisis including:
 - the latest developments surrounding energy bills and the price cap
 - the need for more targeted support this winter, assistance to repay energy debts and the need for a social tariff
 - ongoing developments surrounding the forced installation of prepayment meters in Wales
- took questions from the Group.

Julie James MS, Minister for Climate Change:

- provided an update on the next iteration of the Warm Homes Programme, including:
 - a new worst, fabric and low-carbon first approach
 - extended eligibility criteria for low-income households
 - an extension to the current Nest scheme to ensure no gap in provision.
- took questions from the Group.

Becky Ricketts, Care and Repair Cymru:

- presented a report on the state of older people's housing in Wales
- outlined the work of Care and Repair Cymru supporting its client base
- took questions from the Group.

Meeting 3.

Meeting date: 30 November 2023 (Hybrid – Microsoft Teams and Ty Hywel)

Attendees:

Mark Isherwood MS (Chair of the CPG), **Ben Saltmarsh** (Secretariat, NEA), **Jane Hutt MSJCW**, **Sioned Williams MS**, **Jack Sargeant MS**, **Patricia Denning** (on behalf of Heledd Fychan MS), **Ryland Doyle** (on behalf of Mike Hedges MS), **Yasmin Zahra** (on behalf of Luke Fletcher MS), **Ioan Bellin** (on behalf of Delyth Jewell MS), **Maisie Chatfield** (NEA), **Maya Fitchett** (NEA), **Claire Durkin** (NEA Trustee), **Joseph Carter** (Asthma + Lung UK), **Mason Steed** (Energy Saving Trust), **Steffan Evans** (Bevan Foundation), **Hannah Peeler** (Care & Repair Cymru), **Haf Elgar** (Friends of the Earth Cymru), **James Radcliffe** (Ofgem), **Patrick Gould** (Ofgem), **James Crump** (Ofgem), **Niamh Salkeld** (Senedd), **Gareth Phillips** (Welsh Government), **Amy Dutton** (Citizens Advice), **Becky Ricketts** (Care & Repair Cymru), **Ceri Cryer** (Age Cymru),

David Cowdrey (The MCS Foundation), **Joanna Seymour** (Warm Wales), **Elizabeth Lambert** (Cardiff Council), **Lindsey Kearton** (Citizens Advice), **Matthew Dicks** (CIH Cymru), **Meilyr Tomos** (Gwynedd Council), **Natasha Wynne** (Care & Repair Cymru), **Llŷr Randles** (Cardiff Council), **Sandy Ruthven** (Severn Wye Energy Agency), **Shelley Webber** (Flintshire County Council), **Sion Evans** (Older People's Commissioner), **Tim Thomas** (Property Mark).

Summary of issues discussed:

Focus:

On Fuel Poverty Awareness Day, this meeting reflected on the energy crisis following the UK Government's Autumn Statement and Ofgem's latest price cap announcement. The meeting paid attention to issues including prepayment meters, standing charges, and continued calls for the introduction of a social energy tariff.

This included an opportunity for the members to engage directly with Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, about the Welsh Government's ongoing efforts to address fuel poverty.

The Election of Chair and Secretariat was also held. Mark Isherwood MS was re-elected unopposed to continue as Chair of the Group. Ben Saltmarsh was re-elected unopposed as Secretary to the Group.

Ben Saltmarsh, Head of Wales at National Energy Action, presented on:

- key developments including:
 - the energy price cap and record levels of energy debt
 - updates on the Warm Homes Programme procurement
 - market updates including price cap alterations and revisions to licence conditions.
- answered questions from the Group.

Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip:

- gave a speech on Welsh Government's priorities and work to support vulnerable households through the cost-of-living crisis, including:
 - funding for the Discretionary Assistance Fund
 - partnership with the Fuel Bank Foundation
 - the Nest scheme and the new iteration of the Warm Homes Programme.
- answered questions from the Group.

James Crump, Head of Smart Metering at Ofgem:

- provided updates on Ofgem's developments including:
 - the latest price cap and debt figures
 - improved standards and licence conditions

- calls for input regarding standing charges and new vulnerable customer strategy.
- answered questions from the Group.

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: 11 December 2023

Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

Chair: Mark Isherwood MS

Secretariat: Ben Saltmarsh (NEA Cymru)

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.		
Date	Description and name of provider	Cost
30 November 2023	Refreshments provided by ESS	£60.00
Total cost		£60.00