

Cross Party Group on Older People and Ageing

5 February 2014, Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel

Note of Meeting on Fuel Poverty

Attendees	Apologies
Mike Hedges AM - CHAIR	Bethan Jenkins AM
Darren Millar AM	David Melding AM
Keith Davies AM	Simon Thomas AM
Mark Isherwood AM	Cathrin Manning, Red Cross
Steve Cushen AMSS (Mike Hedges AM)	Andrew Reagan, Consumer Futures
Nicholas Wall, AMSS (Mike Antoniw)	Christine Price, Royal Voluntary Service
Lynda Wallis, Vale 50+ Strategy Forum	Ruth Crowder, College of Occupational Therapists
Monika Hare, Older People and Ageing Network (OPAN) Cymru	
Jackie Radford AMSS (Aled Roberts AM)	
Andrew Bell, SSIA	
Emily Warren, WLGA	
Phil Evans, ADSS Cymru	
John Vincent, Welsh Senate of Older People	
Phyllis Preece, National Pensioners Convention	
John Davies, National Old Age Pensioners Association of Wales	
Nancy Davies, Pensioners Forum Wales	
Phil Vining, Age Connect	
Neil Williams, Care and Repair Cymru	
Iwan Williams, Older People's Commissioner's Office	
Carole Morgan-Jones, NEA Cymru and Co-Chair of the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru	
Lee Parry, Head of Nest – Community Energy, British Gas	
Graeme Francis, Age Cymru	
Gerry Keighley, Age Cymru	
Laura Nott, Age Cymru - SECRETARY	

Welcome and introductions

Mike Hedges AM welcomed everyone to the meeting and called out the apologies.

Date of AGM

The date of the Cross Party Group AGM was agreed as 7 May 2014.

Matters arising from previous meeting

Mike Hedges confirmed that the first three action points had been completed. He spoke briefly about the letter that was sent to him from Baroness Jenny Randerson, as Chair of the Cross Party Group (CPG), about meeting up to discuss scams and No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZs). Mike confirmed that he had spoken with Baroness Jenny Randerson and agreed that we all need to do more to promote NCCZs. Mike said that he felt Wales should be an entire NCCZs, instead of specific regions.

Phyllis Preece asked if there is a way we can push the zones along? Mike Hedges said that a lot of local authorities have no zones, but we're looking for Wales to be an entire NCCZ. Phyllis said we need less talking and more action. Darren Millar said more awareness raising is needed across Wales. With the short debate on the 5.02.14 and the Statement of Opinion, there has been a warm reception from the Government and he has been speaking with the Minister for Local Government, Lesley Griffiths who is very keen to do more.

Presentation by Carole Morgan-Jones, NEA Cymru and Co-Chair of the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru

Carole Morgan-Jones asked the group about their knowledge of NEA Cymru before giving a brief overview of the charity and its key areas of activity. NEA is a charity dedicated to ending fuel poverty and ensuring affordable warmth for all. The charity has been existence for over 30 years and in Wales is represented by NEA Cymru. Carole explained that fuel poverty is defined as the need to spend over 10% of household income on fuel costs to maintain adequate warmth for health and comfort and if a household needs to spend 20% or more of their income they are deemed to be in severe fuel poverty. In 2012 it was estimated that 30% of households in Wales were in fuel poverty.

Carole also outlined some of the current activity NEA Cymru was involved in, including;

- providing fuel debt training for 379 frontline advisors and community workers via its SWALEC supported Fuel Debt and Mentoring Project. The project will enable advisor to give practical support to help clients in debt
- Calor project to assist Fuel Poor Communities in Rural Wales
- Newport Solar Project
- Fuel Poverty Partnership with West Coast Energy wind farm developers
- Nest Stakeholder Group
- Collective Switching - supporting 'Cyd Cymru-Wales Together',
- Training in energy efficiency and fuel poverty
- Fuel Poverty Forums
- Wales Fuel Poverty Conference – 27th March 2014, Cardiff
- Fuel Poverty Coalition, CPG on Fuel Poverty

Carole also outlined the campaigning role of the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru. The Coalition has developed some key calls, namely:

- Delivery energy efficient homes – minimum standards
- Improving health through warm homes – Wales Cold Weather Plan
- Empowering Consumers
- Recycling carbon taxes

Carole explained that tackling fuel poverty had been included in the Welsh Government's wider 'Tackling poverty' agenda but there was too much concentration on Nest and Arbed as the only mechanism to address fuel poverty in Wales. The Welsh Government's fuel poverty strategy is out of date and there is no action plan to show how they intend to eradicate fuel poverty by 2018. In addition, Wales was now the only country in the UK without a Ministerial Advisory Group. The Welsh Government also needed to look at how fuel debt was incorporated into advice services.

Carole also mentioned that some energy suppliers including SWALEC and British Gas have stopped cold calling customers.

Presentation by Lee Parry, Head of Nest

Lee Parry introduced the Nest programme by explaining that it is a Welsh Government-funded scheme aimed at helping people in fuel poverty by increasing the energy efficiency of homes. Nest can provide a range of support from installing improvement measures, carrying out benefit entitlement checks and referring to other organisations that can help.

Lee ran through statistics showing the impact of the programme. These included:

- 45% referrals are from people over the age of 65
- 3000 people have benefited from the entitlement checks
- These have generated an average of £2000 worth of benefits for older people
- They are currently working with suppliers to make sure that people are aware of the programme
- Just over 5000 homes covered throughout Wales this year with multiple measures
- Approximately 45% of households that have been improved contain older people with half of them being people over 75 years of age
- 12,500 homes have been helped by Nest since the scheme began
- Strong relationships with 35 organisations across Wales, including Age Cymru and Mencap, helping to reach customers

Questions

Phyllis Preece – older people are afraid of change, for example, computers, I have one but don't use it. Older people want plain and simple information, as they are afraid of the unknown.

Carole Morgan-Jones – energy is complex, Ofgem has required energy suppliers to reduce the number of tariffs to four per fuel type, but this is still not simple to understand.

Older people in Wales are disengaged and not willing to engage with other schemes. However, they trust local authorities more with their scheme, rather than energy suppliers.

Darren Millar AM – I'm very concerned that we're only reaching a 3rd of people and Nest are only reaching 12,000 since 2011 with only four more years to eradicate. There's no chance the limit will be reached.

Mike Hedges AM – with the Ministerial meeting being scrapped and with no other measures, fuel poverty doesn't seem to be a Welsh Government priority. So with the CPG, we can make a difference – what is the Welsh Government doing to target action?

Mark Isherwood AM – this is not a new problem. We discuss fuel poverty charges with organisations across the table in the CPG on Fuel Poverty meeting - you are encouraged to join. There is good and bad practice – calling for Ministerial Group but Welsh Government say that fuel poverty must come under Alun Davies AM, but it's much more complex than that. Denbighshire have launched new scheme to raise awareness, with Flintshire local authority and local government partnering up to have a more local approach.

Lynda Wallis – What are councils doing? We discuss these issues frequently, but still 3-4000 older people are dying – we need to do more.

Emily Warren – focusing on information shared with older people, the Welsh Government are mapping information provided and there will be a single point access for isolated people and citizens with an information portal. Information will be shared at the next meeting.

Mike Hedges AM – if you're poor, you pay more. Community First is doing work on this but still be joined up. There is one side of Swansea that is bad and the other side is good - there is a real difference across Wales.

Mark Isherwood AM – Health Award Schemes run by the NEA and Welsh Government are preliminary linked to vulnerable older people. The people that fall through eligibility of other schemes can access this scheme.

Carole Morgan-Jones – we are also working with Conwy Communities First to train volunteers to become energy efficiency champions, and we have delivered community

events in Communities First areas, but it can be difficult to engage people in these areas.

Local authorities have mixed schemes, with many working on them lacking support and it is not priority led.

Energy portal – it's important to access information online, but some older people don't have access to online information, so we want to give a one to one / face to face service.

Lee Parry – switching energy suppliers historically has been low with older people, with many, for example, sticking with the energy supplier they have been with for years. This is very common – with a retail market review, we can see the need to simplify prices and conflicts. Nest is working with Communities First with very positive feedback. The affordable home strategy is a warm house scheme, offering boilers to customers, but individuals should come through Nest first as we will replace the whole heating system, not just the boiler.

Graeme Francis – Do you find it generally easy or difficult to reach older people?

Lee Parry – in urban areas it is much easier to reach older people, than rural areas which is always very difficult. We plan to increase our targets in rural areas but there is more to be done.

Graeme Francis – would help from partners / other organisations be helpful?

Lee Parry – Yes it would, please let me know if any organisations would like to work with us.

Andrew Bell – regarding the online portal, this can carry restrictions for those who don't have access online. We are currently taking stock of community hubs in different local authority areas and will finalise this information at the end of March.

Nancy Davies – in 2011/12, Pensioners Forum Wales wrote to energy suppliers about fuel poverty with the aim to work in partnership to tackle this issue (and produced a leaflet which was circulated around the room (attached)). Recent developments have shown that Ofgem will be simplifying their bills and reducing tariffs – we are thoroughly pleased with these results.

Phil Evans – ADSS Cymru would like to join up with other organisations to discuss ways we can tackle fuel poverty in partnership. These issues are complex but Care & Repair simplify it, sharing more information about fuel poverty with vulnerable older people.

Neil Williams – we see a high level of fuel poverty through our casework. We provide services to alleviate it and refer 10% into Nest.

Mark Isherwood AM – Care & Repair are essential – Nest is available for information sharing or if you want a representative in your area. This doesn't cost a penny.

Mike Hedges AM – Nest and Care & Repair have worked well to share information about fuel poverty and energy support. SWALEC in Swansea have helped people get rid of debt. We want to continue to maximise this good practice.

Mike Hedges AM agreed the recommendations from the meeting (see below).

The meeting was drawn to a close.

Recommendations / actions

- The CPG will write to the Minister to ask if the Ministerial Advisory Group should be reformed by the Welsh Government
 - Mike Hedges will meet with Mark Isherwood to discuss partnership working between both Cross Party Groups (Older People & Ageing and Fuel Poverty)
 - One suggestion for the next meeting agenda was low incomes
 - Mike Hedges recommended inviting the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty at a future meeting in 12 months time

Date of next meeting

7 May 2014