

**Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty**  
**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016**  
**Ty Hywel (Conference Room 21), National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay**  
**Minutes**

**In attendance**

**Chair:** Mark Isherwood AM

**Assembly Members**

N/A

**Stakeholders**

Carole Morgan-Jones, NEA Cymru  
Alison Powell, NEA Cymru  
Andy Regan, Citizens Advice Cymru  
Tomos Davies, NEA Cymru  
Steve Woosey, North Wales Energy Advice Centre  
Joanna Seymour, Flintshire County Council  
Eleri Griffiths, Shelter Cymru  
Craig Anderson, Warm Wales  
Stuart Neill, Wales & West Utilities

**Apologies**

Shea Jones, Community Housing Cymru  
Lia Murphy, Ofgem  
Claire Houston, Care & Repair  
Janet Finch-Saunders AM

1. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. There were no matters arising.
2. Mark Isherwood welcomed guests to the Cross Party Group and roundtable introductions followed.
3. Carole Morgan-Jones gave a presentation on the NICE guidelines on tackling excess winter deaths. As part of the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru's manifesto for the Welsh Assembly Elections for 2016 the Coalition has outlined 5 key priorities for action. One of the key priorities is to call on the next Welsh Government to implement the NICE guidelines in Wales.
4. In March 2015, the widely respected National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published its public health guidance on *Tackling Excess Winter Deaths, Morbidity and the Health Risks Associated With Cold Homes*<sup>1</sup>. NICE outlined a number of comprehensive recommendations on how health and social care practitioners must act to reduce the risk of death and ill health associated with living in a cold home.

5. Carole outlined that there is a recognised link between cold damp homes and the impact on health and wellbeing. Experiencing fuel poverty and living in a cold and damp home are well known factors contributing to higher levels of anxiety and depression.
6. Treating the ill-health caused by bad housing conditions in Wales's costs the NHS around £67 million a year. This is 5% of the overall budget for primary healthcare in Wales. The full cost to Welsh society of poor housing, which includes poorer educational attainment and life chances, is estimated to be around £168 million per year.<sup>1</sup>
7. In addition, Wales has unacceptably high rates of Excess Winter Deaths (EWDs). Many EWDs can be prevented if we improve the thermal efficiency of homes, and keep people warm in the winter months. An estimated 43,900 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales in 2014/15; the highest number since 1999/00, with 27% more people dying in the winter months compared with the non-winter months.
8. There are twelve specific recommendations within the NICE guidance. These recommendations include the development of an overarching strategy (such as a Cold Weather Plan) to address the health consequences of cold homes; identify those most at risk of ill health; assess their heating needs; establish a health and housing referral service; and provide access to tailored solutions such as housing insulation, heating improvement programmes and grants.
9. Additionally, a range of individuals and organisations that come into contact with vulnerable households (including health and social care practitioners, housing professionals, voluntary sector workers, heating engineers, meter installers) should be trained to identify vulnerable households that may need assistance with their heating and insulation standards.
10. The Coalition wants the next Welsh Government to adopt the NICE guidelines as a ready-made model for tackling excess winter deaths.
11. The Centre for Sustainable Energy will be tracking how Bristol Council implements the NICE guidance. Whilst it is a different health structure to that which exists in Wales, it will be a useful evidence base.
12. Craig Anderson mentioned his recent discussions and meetings with DECC officials looking at how ECO would be used in the future. Increasingly there is a focus on lower income groups. ECO funds are effectively being halved and grants cut back for carbon reduction schemes so this is no longer a driver to ensure work gets done. There could be decreasing amounts of money going into fuel poverty.
13. Mark Isherwood questioned whether the NICE guidance had been officially adopted by the UK Government across England, but no one present in the room could categorically answer. He pointed out that a significant investment was required in training, but that did not mean that it should not happen.
14. Joanna Seymour commenced the presentation on the work going on as part of the Flintshire Affordable Warmth Service. Joanna discussed the project aim of breaking the cycle of cold homes - unable to work, little money, colder home and fuel debt. The Flintshire Affordable Warmth scheme was set up for people who still have a need for help but fall outside of the criteria for ECO, NEST and Arbed. There is an 'emergency' element whereby funding is set aside to help people in crisis situations so that the scheme is able to help people very quickly.

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<sup>1</sup> BRE Trust and Shelter Cymru, 'The Cost of Poor Housing in Wales' (2011)

15. Clearly, this relies on keeping the funding going. The project development is now being further considered. A person based approach is being considered so that it is not simply, for example, topping up a meter but looking deeper into why the person has no income to top up. They are adopting the spirit of the NICE guidance to look at the whole person and their health and wellbeing. Joanna is drawing on her experience working in the Wirral on a project that looked at fuel poverty within the context of wider issues around maximising benefits and work. Flintshire Council and Cardiff Council have a combined project entitled 'Healthy Homes Healthy People' funded by the Warm and Healthy Homes Fund.
16. Steve Woosey continued with the presentation. He stated that a third of the population is in fuel poverty under the 10% definition; however those in fuel poverty are not pressuring politicians or others to help them. He explained how the project started using funds from the previous Npower emergency fund. Steve Woosey talked about the fuel poor but also other vulnerable groups, including the elderly, young families, recently widowed who may be vulnerable but not necessarily in fuel poverty. NEST is greatly valued but it, and ECO funding, can fluctuate and not everyone who is vulnerable fits the criteria.
17. In Flintshire, 12,000 people are estimated to be in fuel poverty but they are not actively seeking help themselves. You have to actively go out and seek the most vulnerable to help them, they won't come to you. People need good advice, local authority involvement, and money to do something with, and joint working. Good oversight of the project is needed and the local authority is ideally placed to fulfil this role as a trusted provider as well as a source of funding.
18. Flintshire have some schemes that generate money that can then be ploughed back into projects. However, not everyone needs financial help. Some people simply need advice and some need to be signposted. There are only two criteria; all vulnerable people must be served and advice should be provided in the home so that there is a complete package, i.e. all appliances checked, energy advice given.
19. Steve Woosey provided some headline figures, there have been 570 clients; 1,200 measures; 40% needed help and advice only; average saving per household is £313 per year. The scheme has a budget of £160,000 over 2 years.
20. Joanna Seymour also highlighted that as part of a project run in the Wirral, there was involvement from frontline workers across agencies and organisations including district nurses, health visitors, occupational therapists, and the funding came from Public Health prior to the NICE guidance. Public Health has been incorporated into the local authorities in England, and then with the NICE guidance there was added impetus.
21. Mark Isherwood AM mentioned that from a political perspective, all the discourse is around early intervention and coordinated Primary Care Trusts and it was important to look at, and understand, what this means 'on the ground'.

### **Annual General Meeting**

22. Copies of the annual report were provided to stakeholders along with a financial statement for 2015.
23. During the last year the CPG held one meeting (a meeting scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015 was cancelled due to a lack of attendance). The meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015 focused on the action that Ofgem are undertaking into how prepayment customers are treated by energy suppliers and their work on consumer

vulnerability as outlined in the Consumer Vulnerability Strategy published in July 2013. In addition, Andrew Regan, Policy Officer Wales, Citizens Advice Cymru and Carole Morgan-Jones, Director, NEA Cymru presented on the key priority areas for action which the Fuel Poverty Coalition Cymru want the next Welsh Government to implement to tackle Wales' cold homes crisis.

### **Election of Chair and Secretariat**

24. Before Mark Isherwood AM steps down as Chair, he proposed Carole Morgan-Jones and Andrew Regan as joint secretariat to the Fuel Poverty Cross-Party Group, Craig Anderson seconded. There were no objections and this was approved by members.
25. Carole Morgan-Jones highlighted that Mark Isherwood AM had Chaired the Group since 2009 and proposed that he continue, Craig Anderson seconded. There were no objections and Mark Isherwood was duly elected as Chair.
26. The Cross-Party group has spent £22.80 to date on refreshments during 2015.
27. Dissolution of the group will be just after Easter 2016 (end of March) when all Cross-Party Groups will cease to exist in preparation for the Wales Assembly elections. Following the elections, AM's will need to be invited and the Group to reconstitute.
28. Carole Morgan-Jones thanked Mark Isherwood AM for his Chairmanship of the Cross Party Group.
29. The meeting closed.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nea.org.uk/Resources/NEA/Publications/2013/MANIFESTO%20FOR%20WARMTH%20\(LO%20RES\)%20CS6.pdf](http://www.nea.org.uk/Resources/NEA/Publications/2013/MANIFESTO%20FOR%20WARMTH%20(LO%20RES)%20CS6.pdf)