

Cross Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

Wednesday 26th September 2018 12pm

Conference Room C&D, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay CF10 4PZ

Minutes

In attendance			
Mark Isherwood AM	Assembly Member	Nigel Winnan	Wales & West Utilities
Carole Morgan-Jones	NEA	Nick Speed	Centrica
Bethan Proctor	NEA	Fflur Lawson	Smart Energy GB
Haf Elgan	Friends of the Earth	Lowri Kenny	Smart Energy GB
Steffan Evans	Bevan Foundation	Liz Dawson	Smart Energy GB
Michael Anderson	SSE	Rajni Nair	Citizens Advice
Kate O'Sullivan	Sustainable Places	Timothy Roberts	Cardiff Council
Eurgain Powell	FG Office	Christina Nascimento	Cardiff University
Jonathan Cosson	Warm Wales	Andrew Regan	Ofgem
Peter Wong	J Rathbone	Phil Dawson	E.ON
Vicky Howells AM	Assembly Member	Lesley Griffiths AM	CS for Energy
Jon Oates	Welsh Government		

Apologies			
Steve Edwards	Wales and West Utilities	Andy Davies	Speakeasy Advice Centre
Steve Woosey	North Wales Energy Advice Centre	Llyr Gruffydd AC	Assembly Member
Brian Canning	Arbed am Byth	Helen Mary Jones	Assembly Member
Rebecca Hart	Calor	Allison Cawley	Arbed am Byth

1. Welcome

Mark Isherwood AM welcomed attendees and stated that the group would be joined by the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning, and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths at 12:30.

He welcomed Carole Morgan-Jones (NEA) to present on the 2018 UK Fuel Poverty Monitor, an annual report which analyses the policies and programmes to tackle fuel poverty across the four UK nations, and identifies where there are challenges and gaps.

2. Carole Morgan-Jones, NEA Director (CMJ)

A 'Frozen Nation' video was shown to stakeholders which gave an overview of the severe cold weather that was experienced across the UK in early March 2018.

The 2018 Monitor focused on the UK's response to the severe cold weather that was experienced through the winter of 2017-18 and in early March 2018 from the viewpoint of organisations that were on the frontline of the cold snap supporting clients in need. She stated that there were over 500 excess winter deaths each year in Wales which were due to cold homes.

CMJ outlined how frontline services coped with the cold snap and highlighted what had worked well in Wales. Many organisations worked positively and collaboratively to deal with the increased demand for their services. This included staff working overtime, prioritising certain clients, organisations working collaboratively, and relying on the goodwill of staff and volunteers.

However, organisations also experienced a number of challenges. Over half of stakeholders (59%) stated that there was an increase in the number of households and individuals needing help from their organization during the cold snap, and nearly a ¼ (24%) stated that they saw a substantial increase. Other challenges included resources being stretched, appointments cancelled, and an increase in the number of clients needing help due to broken heating. The cold weather caused a lot of concern and worry about the ability of households to afford their energy bills due to their increased need for heating. There was a particular issue with clients on prepayment meters being unable to top up through lack of funds or weather conditions impacting on getting to the shops, and some organisations noted additional applications to hardship funds due to people not having enough credit on their PPMs and as a result going without heating and hot water over the coldest period.

CMJ outlined the recommendations of the Monitor which included the need for the Welsh Government to develop a cold weather plan and instigate a crisis fund to support vulnerable households at times of extreme weather. These measures were needed to have an impact on fuel poverty and to meet the Welsh Government's decarbonisation targets.

3. Lesley Griffiths AM – Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning, and Rural Affairs

Lesley Griffiths (LG) was welcomed by Mark Isherwood AM who outlined the Welsh Government's measures to improve energy efficiency and therefore fuel poverty in Wales, including measures within the Warm Homes Programme (Nest and Arbed).

LG stated that the Welsh Government (WG) had commissioned independent research to support with making recommendations and interventions. Although the current fuel poverty strategy ends this year, a commitment was made to deliver a new plan to build on the progress made since 2011. It was stated that this plan would have outcome focused objectives for the short, medium and longer term, and would be aligned with the decarbonisation agenda.

The Housing Conditions Survey results will be available shortly and will better inform plans to tackle fuel poverty. LG stated that she was committed to tackling fuel poverty and had fought hard for funding for the energy efficiency schemes but the levers to tackle fuel poverty did not rest wholly with the Welsh Government.

CMJ asked if stakeholders could be involved in developing the new fuel poverty strategy. LG stated expertise will be needed and can be fed in via Jonathan Oates.

CMJ asked what role Community Energy can play in tackling fuel poverty. LG said that fuel poverty was considered when working with these groups. It was recognised that planning

policy can sometimes be a barrier for energy projects, and this needs to be challenged as it should be an enabler.

LG stated that more money is needed, and her department has the smallest budget in the Welsh Government. It is unclear what will happen after Brexit in terms of funding for energy efficiency schemes. LG stated that the UK Government has announced a shared prosperity fund, but not yet stated how this will be allocated or distributed.

LG revealed that the Welsh Government will be developing a cold weather plan and a meeting had already taken place with Public Health Wales to discuss this.

Smart meters were raised as a benefit during extreme cold weather, as the householder did not need to leave the house to top up. In addition, emergency credit can be requested online. Smart Energy GB is working hard to spread the message about smart meters.

4. Other Business

Mark Isherwood AM stated that all parties in Wales agree Wales should be given a certain proportion of the shared prosperity fund, however some in Westminster believe Wales should have to bid for funding.

Mark Isherwood AM will be hosting a Smart Energy GB drop-in event in the Senedd on the 3rd October.

CMJ mentioned that Energy UK are holding an event on 2nd November. More details to follow when further information is available.

Stakeholders were asked to note a date in their diary for the Wales fuel poverty conference which will be held on the 14th February 2019 at the Sophia Gardens Cricket Ground in Cardiff.

NEA Cymru will be launching their Warm Homes Campaign on the 21st November at the Senedd. The event will showcase to Assembly Member's the collaborative work going on in Wales and the support available for constituents. An invitation will follow.

MI suggested writing a letter to the Cabinet Secretary thanking her for her attendance at the CPG, and re-iterating the key messages in the Fuel Poverty Monitor. This was agreed.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd May 2018 were approved. There were no matters arising.

The next meeting of the Cross Party Group will be on the 12th December 2018, Ty Hywel, 12pm.