

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency 12th December 2018

In attendance			
Mark Isherwood AM	Assembly Member	Stuart Neil	Wales & West Utilities
Carole Morgan-Jones	NEA Cymric	Rajni Nair	Citizens Advice Cymru
Bethan Proctor	NEA Cymru	Andrew Regan	Ofgem
Ben Saltmarsh	NEA Cymru	Lowri Kenny	Smart Energy GB
Neville Rookes	WLGA	Simon Lannon	Welsh School of Architecture
Timothy Roberts	Cardiff Council	Dawn Shakespeare	Federation of Petroleum Suppliers
Michael Anderson	SSE	Mike Hedges	Assembly Member
Dave Gittens	Severn Wye	Matthew Norman	RLA

Apologies			
Phil Dawson	E.ON	Nick Speed	Centrica
Christina Nascimento	Cardiff University	Amanda Biss	Egnida Limited
Kirsty Williams	Assembly Member	Jonathan Cossan	Warm Wales
Sophia Haywood	UKLPG	Llyr Gruffydd	Assembly Member

1. Welcome

Mark Isherwood (MI) welcomed members and stakeholders to the meeting. Carole Morgan-Jones (CMJ) noted the apologies received. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th September 2018 were approved. CMJ noted the response received from Lesley Griffiths, the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs to the group's request to be involved in the development of the Welsh Government's new fuel poverty strategy.

2. Annual General Meeting

Copies of the annual report for 2017-18 were provided to attendees and the Financial Report was read out by CMJ.

During the last year the CPG has heard from a range of speakers about the prepayment meter price cap and safeguard tariff; the rollout of smart meters in Wales; the new Nest fuel poverty scheme; and the 2018 UK Fuel Poverty Monitor Recommendations. The Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs also attended the September 2018 meeting.

3. Election of Chair and Secretariat

A nomination for chair of the group was received from Mike Hedges AM for MI AM. No other nominations were received. This was seconded by Andy Regan (AR). Mike Hedges AM also nominated NEA Cymru as secretary of the group (CMJ and Bethan Proctor). This was seconded by AR.

4. Cold Weather Priority Scheme

Dawn Shakespeare (DS) of the Federation of Petroleum Suppliers (FPS) was introduced by MI to present on the Cold Weather Priority Scheme.

DS stated that rural Wales relies on oil for heating, and with 50,000 excess winter deaths last winter, the FPS recognises the importance of prioritising the most vulnerable. DS explained that the challenge for the FPS was to identify who was to be classed as vulnerable, and what help was needed. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) posed a problem as DS stated it prevented information from being shared.

For eligibility for the Cold Weather Priority Scheme, the FPS took the decision to prioritise anyone over the age of 75. In Wales, there are 114,000 homes using heating oil, and 45% of those over the age of 60 own their own home in off-gas areas. Due to GDPR, householders must opt into the scheme. DS stated that this caused a problem as some older people do not want to identify themselves as vulnerable. The Cold Weather Priority Scheme is promoted on social media, and on the website - www.coldweatherpriority.co.uk. Householders must contact their local distributor to opt into the scheme.

The scheme is purely voluntary and offers to prioritise deliveries for clients on the scheme in times of cold weather. There are 9 FPS members in Wales, split between North and South Wales. The scheme promises to support the vulnerable as quickly as possible. Some members are extending the scheme to include support for those living in fuel poverty, but not all.

5. Questions

CMJ: How does the FPS classify 'in times of cold weather' i.e. does the temperature have to be below a certain Celsius?

DS: No, if an elderly person feels cold any time of the year and a member is called, they will be prioritised.

Michael Anderson SSE: What proactive action is taken before the cold weather arrives?

DS: There is a 'buy oil early' campaign, encouraging householders to get ready for winter. Planned deliveries are made, if bad weather is known to be coming.

Ben Saltmarsh: How long has the scheme been running and is there any ambition to extend the scheme?

DS: The scheme was launched in 2016. GDPR poses the biggest problem to extending the scheme, as they cannot automatically identify who is vulnerable.

AR: Are members helping customers to balance heating costs throughout the year?

DS: Budget plans are available for most customers,

AR: Is there potential for FPS to have a tool to sign up people to the PSR?

DS: If members are unable to help, the FPS will refer onto other agencies. This conversation must be held over the phone, and the drivers of oil tanks cannot have this conversation with a householder.

CMJ: Heating oil suppliers are not regulated like other energy suppliers, what is your view on calls for regulation?

DS – For some things, it would make things easier. However, it is a difficult industry to regulate and it may put smaller distributors out of business, and these are the suppliers who will provide the out-of-hours deliveries.

DS – There are alternatives to oil which may have less carbon, but they are more expensive. FPS is working on ways to produce cleaner fuel.

Rajni Nair (RN): How do you signpost householders?

DS: The website and social media is utilised, and word of mouth. A higher consumer presence is needed.

MI: How can the FPS accommodate referrals?

DS: If the householder is over the age of 75, they can be signed up to the scheme. Otherwise, all FPS can do is contact the local suppliers in the area.

MI: Is a collective scheme available?

DS: The suppliers are in competition with each other, and therefore getting them to work together would be difficult.

Mathew Norman: Is there a typical tenure type?

DS: Mostly privately owned, category D, older properties without insulation.

6. Updates

MI provided an update on recent developments. These included:

- The Welsh Housing Condition Survey - the first headline result was published in December, which stated that in 2017/18, the average energy efficiency band improved from Band E to Band D. Fuel Poverty stats are due in April.
- The excess winter death stats for the 2017/18 winter have been released with 3,400 EWDs occurring in Wales, the highest on record since the winter of 1975/76. Over 1,000 of these deaths in Wales will be relatable directly to a cold home.
- The National Audit Office published a report on smart meters, stating that the target is unlikely to be met by 2020.

7. Any Other Business

AR mentioned that Ofgem's consumer vulnerability strategy is due in June and could form a potential discussion at a future CPG meeting. In addition, the proposals on network price controls are to be published following a consultation.

RN stated that Citizens Advice has a 'Warmer Wales' project funded by British Gas, supporting those most at risk of living in a cold home.

The date of the next meeting of the CPG will be circulated once confirmed.