

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency
22nd May 2019

In attendance			
Mark Isherwood AM (Chair)	Assembly Member	Claire Durkin	NEA Cymru Trustee
Carole Morgan-Jones	NEA Cymru	Christina Nascimento	Cardiff University
Bethan Proctor	NEA Cymru	Sioned James	Plaid Cymru Assembly Group
Andy Edwards	A&E Energy	Kate Ball	E.ON
Phil Dawson	E.ON	Simon Lannon	Cardiff University
Stephen Chamberlain	Welsh Government	Luke Wallace	Melin Homes
Sarah Paul	Welsh Government	Dave Wallace	Melin Homes
Nick Speed	Centrica	Andy Parker	Calor
Isabelle Michelson	Grayling	Sophia Haywood	UKLPG
Jonathan Cosson	Warm Wales	Liz Lambert	Cardiff Council
Rhian Cook	Melin Homes	Jyoti Atri	Public Health Wales
Louise Woodfine	Public Health Wales	Llyr Gryffudd AM	Assembly Member

Apologies			
Dawn Shakespeare	FPS	Guy Pullman	FPS
Nigel Winnan	WWU	Crispin Jones	E.on
Eurgain Powell	Future Generations	Rajni Nair	Citizens Advice

1. Welcome and Introductions

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 12th December 2018 were approved. MI began by highlighting the Welsh Government's new fuel poverty figures that were released on 21st May 2019 which saw the percentage of households living in fuel poverty drop from 26% in 2008 to 12% in 2018. NEA Cymru commented that the figures are encouraging but further examination will be vital when the detailed analysis is released in the summer.

2. Jyoti Atri & Louise Woodfine Public Health Wales

MI welcomed Jyoti Atri (JA) and Louise Woodfine (LW) of Public Health Wales who presented on Public Health Wales' cold weather planning to support vulnerable households. Excess winter death (EWD) statistics were demonstrated and those at risk were discussed. There was a spike in the number of EWDs in the winter of 2017-18. The reasons for winter pressures were listed, which included not being adequately prepared, vulnerabilities, cold housing, fuel poverty, and stretched primary care services. It was highlighted that Wales has the highest rate of winter admissions to

hospital in the UK, despite colder temperatures in Scotland. JA demonstrated PHW's contribution to reducing the impact of cold weather including the winter pressures project, flu planning, new models of care and prevention in clinical settings (Making Every Contact Count).

LW mentioned areas of current activity including a report on the full cost of poor housing in Wales being undertaken by the Welsh Government with BRE which is due to be published shortly and will make the case for investing in Health and Housing in Wales as well as look at interventions taking place in the UK as well as further afield.

Other activity included health and housing collaborative work and supporting areas of good practice. LW stated the impact of cold housing on health and wellbeing, and highlighted that vulnerable children are twice as likely to have respiratory problems because of living in cold housing. LW stated that the cost of improving cold homes is estimated at £2500 per home, and this is the most effective way of reducing cost to the NHS. Cold housing cost the Welsh NHS £95 million a year. LW spoke about collaborative work with Warm Wales, a joint work programme with Community Housing Cymru, a public health and housing group, a health board checklist, and support for the Healthy Homes Health People Scheme in North Wales.

3. Stephen Chamberlain (SC), Welsh Government Fuel Poverty Department

SC leads on the development of the new fuel poverty plan. It was stated that there are several points needing to be strengthened within the new plan. SC questioned whether the definition of fuel poverty should be amended. It was stated that the Welsh Government may expand the determinants to include the effects of climate change on keeping a house warm, and householder attitudes and behaviour to using technology. It was highlighted with home ownership comes the responsibility to upkeep a property.

The Minister agreed to a health condition pilot and the new plan will state whether this will be embedded. The referral mechanism has been looked at, financial threshold was too low and the EPC rating criteria also too low, and not aligned with the NICE Guidelines to avoid ill health.

The funding for measures is not covered in the current plan so this will be addressed as well as innovation. It was also stated that advice services coordination will be considered in the new plan. SC finished by mentioning that stakeholders will meet in the summer, and a published document is planned to be released for consultation in the autumn, with the aim to publish a finalised plan in February 2020.

4. Discussion

CMJ asked about the new fuel poverty statistics. SC stated it does seem incredible that such a reduction occurred in two years. It was explained that the 2016 data was based on an out-of-date dataset. Although the figures are positive there is a need to be cautious that a new plan supports those that need the most help and are in the deepest fuel poverty.

Llyr Gryffudd AM asked what change had occurred in response to the climate change urgency declaration. SC stated that there will be no more oil fire burners, spending caps may be looked at in the warm homes programme, and cleaner forms of heat sources will be investigated. The Decarbonisation housing report will be released later this year which will help inform the work going forward to reach wider climate change objectives.

LG queried whether there had been an acceleration in pace, not just 'business as usual' in response to the climate change declaration. SC stated that officials were already considering these issues and the declaration would make it more visible to work that was already happening.

SC stated that changing attitudes to how we use energy will be key going forward and there might be a need to advise services that give deeper support than currently, with ongoing follow up action.

CMJ asked PHW about the cold weather plan that the Minister committed to at the previous CPG in September. JA stated PHW had no previous knowledge of this commitment by the Minister. It was stated by SC that an internal cold weather plan is in existence but not published. LW stated a winter planning report is due out in August which will inform the Welsh Government.

CMJ asked whether there would be any commitment to a new fuel poverty target in the new fuel poverty plan? SC responded by saying that meeting an EPC standard doesn't tackle fuel poverty and whilst meaningful targets are needed, there are many determinants outside of the Welsh Government's control. He was happy to work with stakeholders on an aspirational target.

MI re-iterated the Minister's commitment to a cold weather plan at a previous meeting of the CPG held in September 2018 and asked the Secretariat to draft a letter for him to write to the Minister seeking clarification on this issue.

5. Closing

CMJ thanked PHW and WG for their presentations. It was asked if attendees had any suggestions for issues they wanted to discuss at future meetings. Sophia Haywood UKLPG suggested the decarbonisation agenda. MI suggested how we address older housing. CMJ suggested inviting Gowan Watkins from WG to explain the detailed analysis of the fuel poverty statistics which will be released in the summer.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency will be on the 1st October 2019.