



Committee on Fuel Poverty

Minutes of Committee on Fuel Poverty (CFP) Meeting, 15th September 2016

1. All members of the Committee were present: Alice Maynard, Jenny Saunders, Paul Massara, David Blakemore and Lawrence Slade. From BEIS, the Sponsor and Secretariat were present. A BEIS official also attended for the item on smart metering.
2. Following Tom Wright's last day as Chairman of the CFP on 31/8/16, and pending appointment of the next Chair, members agreed that Jenny Saunders would chair the meeting.
3. Members wished to record their thanks to Tom Wright for his chairmanship of the CFP through the period of the reform of the former Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, the establishment of the CFP and its work through to the publication of its first report, scheduled for 23/9/16.

Minutes of last meeting and actions

4. The minutes of the meeting on 12th July had been agreed by email and published on the CFP web pages on 9th September.
5. The majority of actions from the last meeting had been completed and Members were content that remaining actions from the last meeting were being progressed.

Members' Interests

6. Alice Maynard noted her new position as Board Member of Transport for London.
7. No potential conflicts of interest specific to the meeting's agenda were declared.

Off-gas grid working group

8. Members gave further consideration to the composition and remit of the proposed off-gas working group and agreed to discuss these with the Chair of the proposed group.

Smart metering

9. Members were given a detailed overview of the Smart Metering Installation Programme by a BEIS official. This included details of programme timing, benefits and the focus on consumers within the programme. Discussion focussed on:

- the scope for innovative services that could help households in fuel poverty;
- the scope for reduced prepay tariffs (there had been some evidence during the roll-out “Foundation Stage” of suppliers reducing such tariffs);
- the need for customer acceptance of smart meters for the roll-out to be successful;
- whether work on consumer engagement had looked specifically at the needs of the fuel poor;
- the risks of vulnerable customers “self-disconnecting” (e.g. might some consumers react to near real-time information on their consumption by, for instance, turning their heating down when inappropriate to do so);
- the accessibility of smart meters (it was noted that Energy UK had been working with RNIB on in-home display devices suitable for visually-impaired people).

10. Impacts of the CMA proposal to put a cap on prepay tariffs were noted in relation to smart metering. Under the current CMA proposal, the prepay cap would apply to customers with traditional pre-payment meters and SMETS1 meters (first generation smart meters) until the end of 2020. SMETS2 meters installed on the national smart meter communications infrastructure would be exempt from the cap. The Committee queried whether this might result in some customers preferring to keep their traditional prepayment meters, rather than move to smart.

11. The Programme had gathered data and undertaken research from early roll-out of smart meters. Some early evidence indicated there had been no difference in take-up rates of smart meters between those classed as vulnerable consumers by the Programme and other customer types. BEIS was undertaking a project to examine energy suppliers’ plans for post-installation support for vulnerable and pre-payment consumers during the rollout, with a workshop due to take place later in the year. BEIS had established a group to examine consumer journey issues associated with the rollout.

12. Members asked if the Programme could provide short, regular update bulletins to the CFP on the risks and benefits of smart metering for households in fuel poverty, along with a summary of progress in dealing with these and steps being taken to ensure that the fuel poor would benefit.

Research proposals

13. Members discussed initial proposals for research projects. They agreed to consider further a proposal looking at ensuring that activities to deliver carbon budgets and the fuel poverty target would be compatible. The CFP would discuss this work with the Committee on Climate Change, and work with BEIS on drawing up any detailed research proposal.

Publication of report

14. The Committee discussed final details regarding the publication of its first report, presentation of it at the forthcoming NEA conference, and how to ensure effective communication of key points in the report.

Forward Look

15. Members agreed to discuss ECO further with BEIS officials at the next CFP meeting to ensure they could provide input ahead of the next ECO consultation. They also felt that attendance by a member at an ECO delivery group meeting would help inform considerations.

16. The Bonfield review team would also be invited to a future next meeting.

Dates of future CFP Meetings

17. To enable Members to focus on implementing the recommendations made in their first Annual Report, it was agreed to hold future Committee meetings once every two months. Matters arising in between meetings, could be managed via email, telephone conferences or calling an additional meeting. The meeting planned for 17/11/16 was cancelled two new dates were agreed:

- 19/10/16
- 7/12/16