



Committee on Fuel Poverty

Minutes of Committee on Fuel Poverty (CFP) Meeting, 9th March 2017

1. The Chairman and all members of the Committee were present: David Blakemore (Chair), Alice Maynard, Jenny Saunders, Paul Massara and Lawrence Slade. From BEIS, the Sponsor and Secretariat were present, plus officials for sessions on ECO and Warm Home Discount.

Minutes of last meeting and actions

2. The minutes of the meeting on 1st February had been agreed by email and published on the CFP web pages on 27th February.

3. The majority of actions from the last meeting had been completed and members were broadly content that remaining actions from the last meeting were being progressed.

Members' Interests

4. No potential conflicts of interest specific to the meeting's agenda were declared.

Reaching households in fuel poverty that won't be covered by data sharing proposals

5. Members discussed ways of moving towards a position where all households in fuel poverty could be reached with appropriate support. The focus of the discussion was on reaching those who would not be covered by the data sharing provisions in the current Digital Economy Bill. The provisions were to enable data sharing for the purpose of helping households in fuel poverty. As a result, targeting of the Warm Home Discount (WHD) scheme would be improved so that potentially up to 60% of payments could reach households in fuel poverty. It was also understood that subsequently the provisions could be used to improve ECO targeting.

6. Assuming successful implementation of the data sharing provisions, there would still be a significant proportion of the fuel poor population that was difficult to identify and reach. For some of these, the usual types of proxies for fuel poverty, such as certain categories of benefits, could not be applied. For instance, these included households where residents were either ineligible for benefits or do not to apply for them.

7. Members noted that there were various ideas about how to reach the population, such as the new flexible eligibility element within ECO, plus more

generally other ways of working through local partners, including health and social care sectors.

8. Another part of the approach could involve targeting support more broadly so that the chances of reaching more households in fuel poverty would be increased. For instance, support could be aimed at the “just about managing” category, or potentially on some households which might fall just beyond the Low Income-High Cost definition (e.g. households on just above the income threshold in high cost housing, on the basis that they could later fall into the low income category). Such a wider targeting approach could, however, be less efficient. It might also work against the principle in the Government’s fuel poverty strategy of prioritising the most severely fuel poor.

9. Members agreed they needed to develop a greater understanding of the breakdown of the population, to enable further work on the means of reaching them. BEIS agreed to provide data on the property characteristics of households in fuel poverty by energy efficiency band.

Warm Home Discount

10. The Committee noted that BEIS would be consulting on the future WHD later in 2017.

11. The Committee had recommended in its 2016 report that there should be continuing bill support mechanisms for households in fuel poverty until sufficient energy efficiency improvements could be made in their homes. Looking forward, it would be important to consider how to optimise WHD, including integrating it effectively with other support. For instance, options could include using part of the WHD budget so that it contributed to improving energy efficiency, rather than compensating for lack of installations. One way might be to remove WHD from, or reduce it for, households where there had been significant improvement (e.g. as a result of ECO), so that the available funding could be targeted on households in greater need of support. Members noted that there could be communications challenges around explaining such mechanisms (e.g. why one type of households received WHD and another didn’t), whereas the current WHD was based on a simpler proposition.

12. The Committee agreed to develop more detailed advice for BEIS ahead of the consultation on WHD.

ECO

13. The Committee discussed ECO with BEIS officials as part of their ongoing strategic advice on the scheme post-2018.

14. There was wide ranging discussion covering areas such as:

- the balance between addressing carbon reduction targets, one million homes manifesto commitment and fuel poverty;

- the extent to which support could, and should, be focussed on properties in Bands F & G;
- ways of demonstrating how tackling fuel poverty resulted in wider benefits, such as health, and the extent to which modelling across Government departments could currently be used to assess these;
- obtaining better data on differing characteristics of properties across the energy efficiency Bands, to help inform considerations of what sorts of interventions would be most appropriate;
- concerns about the size of rural communities for ECO being defined as under 10,000 properties, given that many households in fuel poverty are in villages, hamlets or remote areas;
- effective integration with WHD.

Standing items

15. Discussion under 'standing items', included the following points:

- noted the recent Budget had not included any new provisions regarding fuel poverty or energy efficiency;
- noted the importance of the Clean Growth Plan to driving the BEIS agenda – it would be important to understand the implications of it when published and consider how to draw upon it for tackling fuel poverty;
- discussed the forthcoming adjournment debate tabled by Paul Scully MP, for 14th March. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to Mr Scully ahead of the debate;
- the need for Government to plan an annual debate in Parliament on fuel poverty;
- discussed options for the Committee's future approach to high-level communications;
- discussed plans for reporting by the Committee. It was likely that they would aim for publishing a report in or around September. Members would also publish a short, mid-year update;
- noted timescales for the Committee's proposed research project and how results would be used in reporting.
- recruitment of a new member for the committee

Dates of future CFP Meetings

16. Dates for forthcoming meetings are:

- 5th April 2017
- 8th June 2017
- 18th July 2017