



Committee on Fuel Poverty

Minutes of Committee on Fuel Poverty (CFP) Meeting, 19th October 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, plus officials for the session on ECO.

Minutes of last meeting and actions

2. The minutes of the meeting on 15th September had been agreed by email and published on the CFP web pages on 19th October.

3. 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

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

ECO and future obligations

5. Officials from BEIS attended for a wide-ranging and detailed discussion on the future of ECO.

6. It was noted that some stakeholders had been arguing for the period of transition to the new scheme to be longer than the one year proposed by the Government in the consultation. Members were of the view that the period should not be extended, as to do so would delay the move to a scheme with a much greater fuel poverty focus. The readiness of the supply chain to move to a new obligation was discussed, noting varying views among stakeholders.

7. Members discussed the challenge of improving ECO's ability to tackle fuel poverty whilst at the same time working towards the Government's manifesto commitment to insulating one million homes. The CFP's report had recommended significantly improving the targeting of ECO funds towards households in fuel poverty. Members stressed their focus in the current period on measures for households in Bands F&G, given the Government's 2020 milestone.

8. Members noted that ECO was not necessarily the best vehicle for dealing with certain types of properties, and that other, more bespoke, types of help would be needed. The Central Heating Fund was mentioned as an example of a step in the right direction.

9. The scope for including fixed requirements in ECO was discussed, for instance as a way of ensuring a certain number of F&G properties were reached. The risk was that it could increase costs per household treated and hence reduce the overall numbers of households helped within a given ECO budget, thereby causing tension with the 'million homes Manifesto target'. This led into discussion about the mix of measures, and whether there was potential for more low-cost measures to have significant impacts on the numbers of F&G households, plus the scope for bundling such simpler measures with other measures to maximise impacts.

10. The consultation proposals regarding future flexibility, enabling local authorities to determine eligibility for a portion of the scheme, were discussed. Members were supportive of this, and felt it could be particularly useful for focussing on vulnerable consumers and helping those with poor health. Guidelines would be important, and they felt they should take into account the approach to vulnerability set out in the CFP's report.

11. The Committee asked officials to let them know of areas where they would find CFP input helpful - and to continue to do so at any points in the future. Initial areas included whether there was a role for mandatory requirements as opposed to built-in incentives, minimum requirements for solid wall insulation and how to broaden referrals into the scheme, such as from health professionals. The Committee agreed to consider these further.

12. Members asked for a further meeting with ECO officials ahead of the next consultation being published.

Feedback from NEA Conference

13. The CFP's first report had been published during the NEA conference. Members had presented the report and then invited comments from attendees through group discussions. The NEA had compiled feedback from the sessions for the CFP. Members noted that some of the key points included: the need to focus ECO sufficiently on fuel poverty, the need for more funding, the importance of a joined-up approach across Government; and securing the right approach for the private-rented sector. Going forward, priorities should include ensuring the health sector can contribute to tackling fuel poverty, improving targeting and identifying the fuel poor. There were also comments on how the CFP can ensure that its work leads to effective action.

Forward look, stakeholder communications and planning

14. Members were keen to continue the levels of stakeholder engagement (whilst recognising the Committee's capacity constraints). They discussed providing initial post-report feedback to stakeholders, and inviting further comments under its five main workstream areas: housing (particular focus on private rented sector), future ECO design and delivery, health and social care, re-targeting Government policies (to align with the fuel poverty milestones) and financing. Members also discussed their attendance and participation at a number of forthcoming conferences and events.

Other business

15. Members were monitoring progress of the Digital Economy Bill (and had submitted evidence for the Bill's committee stage), with a view to ensuring that the provisions concerning data sharing for fuel poverty measures were passed successfully.

Dates of future CFP Meetings

16. Dates for future CFP meetings are:

- 7th December 2016
- 1st February 2017
- 5th April 2017