

## **Minutes of Committee on Fuel Poverty (CFP) meeting: 21 June 2022**

### **Members Present:**

Caroline Flint (Chair), Belinda Littleton, Liz Bisset, Anu Singh, Anthony Pygram and Gordon McGregor

Invited guests in attendance were BEIS officials, as well as guests from Citizens Advice, E-ON, Octopus Energy, Scottish Power and Utilita.

### **Members interests**

1. No new interests declared.

### **Minutes of Last Meeting**

2. Minutes from May meeting were agreed.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

3. The Chair met with the Chair of the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel. It is understood that they will be supported by a secretariat of three including one providing analytical support. This tied into discussion on capacity.

**Action 1:** CFP to consider meeting with fuel poverty advisory groups of the devolved administrations in due course.

4. The Chair thanked the Committee for their input on their response to the Energy Bill Support Scheme consultation.

5. There was a discussion about capacity of the Committee and the desire for additional secretariat support.

6. The Committee spoke about how best to target and influence key stakeholders.

**Action 2:** CFP to develop a stakeholder map and agree ownership of individual relationships.

### **Action Log**

7. Members discussed the outstanding actions. This informed a conversation about future planning for and focus of Committee meetings.

8. The Committee plan to develop their workplan for the rest of the year by the end of July.

**Action 3:** CFP to develop workplan by end of July.

### **Research Project Planning**

9. A discussion was had about the research project process and the timelines that were to be expected. This included experience from previous research bids.

**Action 4:** BEIS officials to provide the Committee with information on relevant current and previous research.

10. The Committee discussed whether it would be possible to set out short, medium and long-term research goals to help inform future projects.

11. The Committee raised the possibility of partnering with other organisations on projects and whether to consider smaller projects.

**Action 5 and 6:** The Committee agreed to have a workshop on research project plans. The Committee will outline all considerations that need to be taken prior to starting the research project.

### **Guest Speaker: Citizens Advice. Connie Thorn, Senior Policy Researcher.**

11. Citizens Advice highlighted their current priorities and projects including the recently announced Energy Price Support Review.

12. Citizens Advice shared some anonymised case studies with the Committee as well as sharing key themes coming through their helplines.

13. They highlighted that they were particularly concerned with PPM customers being unable to afford energy and self-disconnecting. They also highlighted the disproportionate effect that rising energy prices were having on those with disabilities.

14. The Committee enquired about Citizens Advice's view on the current Government provisions.

15. The Committee were keen to support the work of Citizens Advice and asked to be kept informed on their Review.

**Action 7 & 8:** Citizens Advice to send the Committee further information regarding their Review.

**Energy Company roundtable & Q&A with Guests from** EON (Brian Tilley), Octopus Energy (Kat Renton), Scottish Power (Duncan Beattie) and Utilita (Derek Lickorish MBE)

16. The Chair asked how energy companies were supporting customers at this time especially those in fuel poverty and debt.

17. Energy companies spoke on how issues such as coronavirus (COVID-19), price increases in energy and rising cost of living in general, and the removal of the Universal Credit uplift were impacting their customers.

18. All the representatives reported a significant rise in customers contacting them for help and support. They updated the Committee on the measures they have in place to support this surge in contact and how they were also supporting their call handlers during this challenging time. This included training and support for the mental health of their employees.

19. Energy companies spoke about the positive impact the Energy Bill Support Scheme would have on customers but highlighted the need for further information on implementation, such as timing of payments and interaction with billing systems. There is concern that the need for support will only increase come October.

20. The Committee asked energy companies for views on how the support from EBSS could work for customers in arrears or debt. This was a live issue. Most want companies and customers to have flexibility in how the payment is handled.

21. There was a discussion on the introduction of social tariffs – the energy companies had differing views on options for implementation and funding.

22. The Committee asked the energy companies for views on current energy efficiency schemes. Companies agreed that now was the time to be doubling down on implementing measures for the most vulnerable to ensure a just transition to net zero and there was general support for the roll-out of smart meters.

23. The Committee asked how and whether the companies were working together on messaging to ensure customers were receiving clear help and guidance. There was a suggestion in discussion that energy companies were best placed to speak to their customers about these matters.

24. There was a discussion about the environmental charges on customers' bills and some call for this to be looked at again.

25. There was a brief discussion on experience of action being taken in other countries and how that compared with the UK. This included a broader discussion on funding methods.

**Action 9:** Following discussion, Energy companies to send further information on support available. Octopus Energy to send further information on prices and affordability, including a Recommendation paper and a high level summary of the main customer support available and innovative solutions.

**Action 10:** Secretariat to share detailed note of roundtable discussion with Members.

### **BEIS Policy Updates**

26. BEIS Officials gave an update on policies including Warm Home Discount, Warm Home Discount Scotland and the Energy Company Obligation.

27. The Committee discussed what future support might be needed. The Committee felt strongly that any further initiatives around cost of living should be targeted and focus on helping those living in or at risk of being in fuel poverty. They also noted the importance of energy efficiency delivery.

### **Forward look**

28. The Committee were keen to see updates on current BEIS schemes, with reference to targeting and an indication of geographical spread.

**Action 11:** BEIS officials to provide Committee with further information on the targeting and delivery of BEIS energy efficiency schemes.

29. The Committee discussed the potential for fuel poverty 'champions' both within local authorities and the health sector.

**Actions 12 & 13:** Identification of fuel poverty 'champions' in local authorities and the NHS.

**AOB**

No further issues were raised.

30. The next meeting will be held on the 25<sup>th</sup> July.