



Committee on Fuel Poverty

Minutes of Committee on Fuel Poverty (CFP) September formal meeting:

Members Present: Anu Singh, (Covering Chair), Belinda Littleton, Liz Bisset, Anthony Pygram, Gordon McGregor (online), Caroline Flint (online).

Invited guests in attendance: Officials from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Welcome, Members Interests and Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The Chair welcomed members and thanked them for their engagement. No new member interests declared. Members cleared minutes for July.

Agenda Item 2: Action Log: Update on Progress

2. The Committee reviewed the action log and discussed who would lead on specific actions and DESNZ officials provided an update regarding outstanding actions.

Agenda Item 3: Stakeholder Engagement

3. Members noted additional stakeholder engagements to be added to the engagement log.

Agenda Item 4: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

4. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) officials provided an overview of the Decent Home Standard (DHS) policy programme. The DHS sets the minimum standard to which all social rented sector (SRS) properties are to be held to (housing association and local authority owned). DLUHC consulted on applying the DHS to the private rented sector (PRS) in September to October 2022.
5. DLUHC officials confirmed that any changes to the standard would require legislation changes.
6. DLUHC confirmed the DHS review wouldn't replicate the existing PRS Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) but would be designed to work alongside any existing and future standards.
7. DLUHC officials noted the focus on mould in domestic properties, particularly in the rented sectors. DLUHC have now published damp and mould guidance which sets out new expectations for landlords. DLUHC confirms they have been working with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) on guidance in this space.

8. DLUHC officials reported that they have been working to ensure local authorities are aware of proposed changes to the DHS. As part of this, they have also been trying to encourage landlord participation, who will benefit from improving the quality of their housing stock. Discussion of a potential property portal to support landlords and tenants.
9. The Committee discussed the use of Section 21 notices. DLUHC officials responded that legislation was introduced just before recess removing Section 21 to protect tenants, who may have been too scared to raise issues for fear of being evicted.
10. DLUHC noted that they are considering options to address landlord views/behaviour and that conduct standards have thus far reflected the need to encourage landlords to respect and listen to tenants. DLUHC have been clear that tenant behaviour is not the cause. DLUHC has also additionally brought the voices of tenants into the consultation process.
11. DLUHC stated within the Social Housing Regulation Act, provision was made to direct the Regulator of Social Housing to introduce standards relating to the competence and conduct of all social housing staff. Within this standard, there will be a requirement for senior staff to gain an appropriate housing management qualification. Also, DLUHC will ensure that communications place the onus on landlords to provide high quality housing and that damp and mould are the landlord's responsibility to address.
12. DLUHC officials noted that the forthcoming results of the consultation on the DHS in the PRS will look at what standards are being used and what metrics should be used.
13. The Committee asked whether there was information available on homes most impacted by mould and damp and what the most appropriate energy efficiency measures were in those property types. DLUHC officials responded that it tended to be older, detached and poorer quality properties which are harder to decarbonise and need more complex retrofitting. The English Housing Survey (EHS) provides more information on this. There is an outcome-based target standard of EPC 'C'. DLUHC reported that they have a good picture of the housing stock and what measures are required, and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) has helped understand both aspects of this question.
14. DLUHC confirmed there remained a strong correlation between low EPC bands and homes that cost more to heat (as requires more energy to heat and lots of heat loss). There remain technical risks around the installation of solid wall insulation (SWI).
15. DLUHC officials reported that the 'Fabric First' approach was adopted in the Heat and Buildings Strategy and this approach is being considered during the Future Homes Standard consultation. During the consultation DLUHC is asking what they should be prioritising. DLUHC officials state that there was a clear indication of low EPC homes costing more to heat as energy efficiency measures generally remain important in driving down costs and enabling warmer safer homes. DLUHC officials explained they are currently looking at reforming EPCs to make sure they are fit for the future. DESNZ has funding streams available to support landlords with energy efficiency improvements, however landlord's do not always choose to access this support.

16. The Committee noted that some other countries were providing low-interest loans for energy efficiency work and asked whether government had considered it as an option.
17. The Committee noted wider concerns that many landlords could leave the sector because increasing costs, regulation and standards. DLUHC officials explained that the reductions in supply of private rented properties has been exaggerated by some commentators. However, it is something DLUHC will continue to monitor to further understand the state of the market. DLUHC will continue to work with tenants, landlords and other stakeholders as we move forwards with reforms.

Future Homes Standard

18. DLUHC implemented a significant uplift to energy efficiency standards in new homes in 2021 and will follow up with a consultation later this year on the full Future Homes Standard which will come into force in 2025. Homes built to the FHS will be net zero ready homes requiring no further upgrades to become net zero as the grid decarbonises.
19. The Committee asked if the FHS considers overheating. DLUHC officials confirmed the 2021 change in standards introduced a new requirement to mitigate against the risk of overheating – Part O of the 2021 Building Regulations.
20. DLUHC officials relayed that the FHS will focus on carbon, energy efficiency, fabric performance and customer bills, further confirming that bills will be lower in newer homes because low carbon heating is being delivered alongside energy efficient homes.
21. The chair thanks DLUHC officials for their insightful presentation and for attending.

ACTION: DLUHC and DESNZ to investigate whether low-interest loans for energy efficiency programs are currently being explored.

Agenda Item 5: CFP Research Update

22. DESNZ research colleagues provided an overview of progress with the proposed research project, including refinement of questions. There was a discussion regarding timeline and opportunities.

Agenda Item 6: Fuel Poverty Strategy Review

23. DESNZ colleagues provided an update on the review of the fuel poverty strategy. Discussion followed about the likely scope and engagement with Ministers.

Agenda Item 7: Home and Local Energy

24. DESNZ colleagues provided on an update of local net zero policies working with local authorities across England.
25. The team works with local authorities (LAs), community groups at a grassroots level, predominantly in England. Forms of engagement include:

- **Establishing Hubs to deliver schemes** (such as the Local Authority Delivery scheme (LAD)).
- **Net Zero forum** chaired by a Director General with representatives from 15 local authority networks including mayoral authorities.
- **Delivery programme** -Five hubs (representing the whole of England) provided with staff to help bring in additional private finance. DESNZ colleagues provide consortia - which enables councils underfunded councils to participate in funding competitions enabling more representatives from smaller councils.
- **Produce tools and helping share knowledge**
- **Work with U.K. Research and Innovation (UKRI)** looking at smart local energy solutions and identifying non-technical barriers to net zero in defined areas, working with cities and DLUHC.
- **Community Energy:** a rolling programme across two years administering £10million fund for communities in England, delivered by five hubs.

26. The Committee asked if they could assist with promoting local authorities to prioritise fuel poverty, acknowledging the difficult choice with competing priorities and resource limitations.

27. DESNZ colleagues noted that knowledge sharing is improving, citing several examples of knowledge sharing practices, including an annual conference for knowledge sharing.

ACTION: CFP to work with DESNZ to write a letter to be distributed to local authorities to encourage prioritisation of work to tackle fuel poverty.

ACTION: DESNZ to investigate whether local authorities publish any data on enforcement.

Agenda Item 8: DESNZ Update

28. DESNZ colleagues provided an update on engagement with the new Secretary of State.

29. The Committee asked what they can do to support the Secretary of State in the lead up to winter. DESNZ colleagues noted work will be on progressing on the fuel poverty strategy review including external engagement and encourage the Committee to continue to engage and share their views.

AOB – The next meeting will be held on the 20th of November 2023.