

## **Minutes of the FPAG/Local Authority Meeting – 6 March**

### **Meeting Attendees 6<sup>th</sup> March**

#### **FPAG**

Peter Lehmann	Chair Fuel Poverty Advisory Group
John Chesshire	EEPH
Mervyn Kohler	Help the Aged
Simon Roberts	CSE
Matthew Bateman	Centrica
Haley Peters	eaga
Merron Simpson	CIH
Valentine Mulholland	EDF
Jonathon Stern	energywatch
Lorraine Donaldson	NEA
Peter Sumbly	NEA
Ian Manders	ACE

#### **LAs**

Jane Mears	East Riding District Council
Sarah Allen	Luton Council
Dave Colbourne	Sefton

#### **Officials**

Dawn Armstrong	BERR
Sally Harrison	Defra
Sian Priest	Defra
Tyrone Homes	Defra
Penny Dunbabin	Defra
Angela Bourke	Ofgem

#### **Apologies**

Kevin Miles	Npower
David Mannering	Npower
Graham Kirby	E:On
Sarah Coe	LGA
Cliff Duff	Easington
Oliver Myers	Camden
Tim German	Cornwall Sustainable Energy Partnership
Teresa Perchard	CAB

#### **Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes were agreed. The following points arising from the minutes were discussed.

- Work is ongoing in BERR to raise the profile of fuel poverty within the RDAs. Pilots are taking place to encourage RDAs to part fund fuel poverty projects that will also result in job creation.
- CSE is carrying out a project to map the policy chain from central government to local delivery.
- NEA is working on a project with Durham University Business School to demonstrate the benefits in terms of job creation of local authority participation in Warm Zones type projects.

### Fuel Poverty Indicator

Defra gave an update on the latest state of play of the local authority fuel poverty indicator, due to be published on Monday 10 March. The final indicator will encourage local authorities to tackle houses of those in receipt of qualifying benefits with a SAP rating of below 35 and SAP rating of above 65.

The following points were made in discussion:

- Concern that action focused on those in receipt of benefits especially housing benefits – targeting will be a problem as only limited data available to LAs. The result is that action is likely to be skewed towards the rented sector.
- The indicator should be modified to allow action on all housing with a SAP rating of under 35, regardless of whether the inhabitants are in receipt of benefit. This would particularly help older people who are often reluctant to claim benefits.
- The indicator needs to be included in Local Area Agreements in order to have any real impact.

### HECA

Defra began by giving an overview of the two local authority indicators on carbon reduction. Indicator 185 covers the LA's own operations and indicator 186 is about reducing carbon emission per capita within the community.

The following points were made in discussion:

- It is not clear what weighting the Audit Commission gives to compliance with national indicators as opposed to statutory targets.
- Fuel poverty statutory target could be included within Local Area Agreements.
- FPAG should seek to engage with the Audit Commission on its workplan to improve understanding of fuel poverty.
- Concern was raised at the shift away from fuel poverty to carbon savings.

On HECA the following points were made in discussion:

- LAs believe abolishing HECA officers will have a detrimental effect. They are key to local authority fuel poverty work. Both Warm Zones and Warm Front are likely to suffer.
- It would be helpful if the abolition of HECA officers could be delayed by at least a year to allow the LA fuel poverty indicator to bed in.

### Information sharing within Local Authorities

There was a brief discussion on data sharing. The FPAG Chair commented that although there were no provisions in the Energy Bill on data sharing, there was considerable work going on to identify options. It was suggested that the Audit Commission should be more involved.

### Energy Performance Certificates

Defra gave an update on the latest state of play on energy performance certificates. A consultation is due to be published shortly. A pilot on social housing and EPCs has just been completed.

### CERT

Defra gave a brief presentation on CERT commenting that it was doubling the action required from suppliers by EEC and that 40% of the carbon reductions should come from a priority group of customers in receipt of benefit and the over 70s.

The following points were made in discussion:

- Defra is conducting research into the numbers likely to be removed from fuel poverty by CERT.
- CERT is leading to an increase in cold calling from companies subcontracted by the energy companies to get leads from the priority group.
- Some unscrupulous practices taking place as companies enter the market to sell information on priority group members to energy companies.
- These actions could undermine Warm Front and Warm Zones work.
- There is a need to understand the structure of the market in order to highlight the risk points.
- CERT solid wall insulation standard does not comply with building control standards.
- Some work is not being installed to correct standard.

### Warm Front

PL invited local authority representatives to let FPAG know how Warm Front is working on the ground. The following points were made:

- Some clients are required to pay top ups for Warm Front.
- The issue of whether to increase the level of Warm Front grant is currently with ministers.
- If a top up is required it is suggested that clients should have the opportunity to get a second quote from another Warm Front installer. Concern was raised that would mean the client goes to the back to the queue to wait for another installer to be allocated.
- There is a limited choice of boilers.
- LAs are experiencing difficulty in receiving notification from Warm Front that installations have been completed.
- Transparency of costs is another issue – the breakdown of labour costs, material for a customer contribution is often not clear.
- There are still delays in Warm Front organising the short connection of households to gas in some areas.

### Private sector renewals

It was reported that there has been a cutback in funds for grants for renewal of existing housing stock. A proposal for an equity release scheme to allow people to release funds to pay for refurbishment of their home needs some initial funding and support from Government to get it off the ground.

### Monitoring of HHRS/HMO

Monitoring is taking place of the number of landlords who refuse to allow their tenants to have installations under Warm Front. A successful pilot has taken place which involves eaga notifying the local authority if a landlord has refused permission. Local authority representatives reported that they were no longer receiving notification from eaga of landlords refusing permission. EEPH have undertaken research into HHSRS which will be available soon.

### Community Energy Efficiency fund

Defra reported that 50 projects were up and running and it looked as though the allocated funds would all be spent.

The following points were made in discussion:

- The deadline for spending the money (end of this financial year) was generally thought to be unhelpful, though it did have the advantage of forcing central government to release the funds as early as possible.
- The administration and reporting requirements were considered too burdensome by some authorities.
- An evaluation covering lessons learnt and advice to local authorities and regions to on how to support the agenda would be useful.