



DRAFT

Safe, Warm Homes Working Group Meeting 06 Nov 2014

Attendees:

Maria Wardrobe.	National Energy Action – Chair
Mervyn Kohler.	Age UK
Christine Tate.	British Gas (On the phone)
Phil Hayes.	Dept. Communities and Local Government.
Russell Taylor.	Dept. Work and Pensions & AAA Secretariat.
Jane Minter.	Care & Repair England.
John Welham.	Leeds Older People’s Forum.
Alan Clifford.	Dept. Energy and Climate Change.

Apologies:

Shaun Robinson	Foundations
Peter Coleing	Future East
Pam Wynne	Dept. Energy and Climate Change
Sue Adams	Care & Repair England
Rachel Wookey	Public Health England
Marc Primaroh	McCarthy and Stone
Sarah Davis	Chartered Institute of Housing
David Price-Evans	Checkatrade.com
John Simmons	
Daniel Walker-Nolan	Citizens Advice

Welcome, introduction and previous action points

1. Maria welcomed everyone to the meeting and after brief introductions noted apologies for absence. On the day a number of members were unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances. This meant the agenda was reordered.
2. All previous meeting’s action points had been cleared or would be covered in the meeting.

2. Alliance Update

Russell provided a quick update.

Selected highlights: -

- Alliance membership now approaching 700 – recent joiners include EE, Govt. Office for Science and the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Twitter followers now over 4k and growing.
- Daniel Walker Nolan, who previously represented Electrical Safety First, has moved to Citizens Advice. Daniel has asked to remain as a member of the Group and at a future meeting would like to present some policy work he is currently involved in.
- In advance of the meeting David from Checkatrade.com had forwarded a press notice on behalf of the company following a recent watchdog programme. David was keen to ensure that members of the Group were able to establish a balanced view. The press notice can be viewed here. www.checkatrade.com/watchdog
- SGN has also asked to join the Group. The Company wants to engage with stakeholders and persons with an interest in Social Responsibility. Maria has spoken with Robbie Stevenson and in principle he is happy to be the lead on the Group for the Gas networks Robbie will be invited to our next meeting.

3. Update from Christine Tate.

As Chris could only stay for the first part of the meeting she provided an update from British Gas (BG). This included the launch of their “Getting Ready for Winter Campaign and the 10th Anniversary of the British Gas Energy Trust.

Chris explained that a key priority for BG is helping their customers stay warm and safe during the winter. There are three areas where support is available to the public.

The first is energy efficiency. £1 in every £4 spent on heating is wasted due to poor insulation. Fixing these leaky homes, with energy efficiency measures, is crucial to helping people spend less on their energy bills and to have warmer, more comfortable homes.

Over the past six years BG has insulated the homes of more than three million customers. But over 12 million homes in Britain are still without adequate loft and cavity wall insulation. BG is committed to tackling this problem. And one important way they achieving this is through the Government’s Energy Company Obligation, or ECO.

BG is working alongside local authorities and housing associations - to install insulation and heating improvements, including external solid wall insulation and district heating. BG is now offering free loft and cavity wall insulation. Nine out of ten households that need insulation can get it free from British Gas.

Research recently carried out showed that very few people believe their home qualifies for free insulation. It is actually available to 90% of homes that need it and BG would really appreciate Alliance members help in getting that message out there - to ensure people aren't missing out.

The second area where British Gas offers support is its service for more vulnerable customers. They offer practical assistance to vulnerable customers through their dedicated 'Here to Help' team. There's a range of services:

- free gas safety checks;
- priority assistance in case of a boiler breakdown;
- relocating meters to make them more accessible;
- alternative formats for bills like large print or Braille
- and also a nominee scheme, so if customers don't feel confident dealing with their own account, then they can name someone to do it on their behalf.

British Gas spent £380m last year helping 1.8 million of their most vulnerable customers.

They also have the widest eligibility criteria for the Warm Homes Discount (WHD) scheme, and in 2013 gave over half a million customers a £135 rebate on their energy bill.

This prompted a discussion about the broader group, through which energy suppliers provide a discount to those not covered by the WHD core scheme. Each energy supplier applies its own criteria to the broader group. When changing energy suppliers consumers need to have regard to the criteria that their new supplier will apply to the broader group.

AP1: Maria to invite a representative from DECC or Ofgem to the next meeting to discuss the consultation on the Warm Home Discount which closed on 13th November.

British Gas Energy Trust

Since 2004, British Gas has donated over £75 million to the Trust. In the last ten years, the Trust has helped over 120,000 families and individuals in need, providing grants to help people clear debts and advice for improving energy efficiency and money management. All are key steps towards reducing energy bills and help reduce the likelihood of getting into debt in the future.

To reach more individuals and families in need the Trust now provides funding

to 16 debt advice centres across Britain, working with a range of organisations including Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter Services and a range of independent organisations.

4. Big Energy Saving Network

In Pam's absence Maria provided an update on the Big Energy Saving Network.

Not all consumers are benefitting from the best deals. Even with simpler tariffs and better information many still need extra help to take action to reduce their costs. There is no need to re-invent the wheel – Outreach through trusted local, community and charitable organisations is a proven concept. That is why DECC created the **Big Energy Saving Network**.

The Network provides a programme of outreach to help vulnerable consumers take action to save money.

- Delivered through organisations they know and trust.
- Focussed on going further than advice and helping consumers take concrete actions.
- Complementary outreach to empower frontline workers to help the people they come into contact with.

Over the past year the Network has funded over 150 projects
Trained over 500 volunteers, Reached over 90,000 people and secured a further £1m for a further campaign this winter

For more information: Big Energy Saving Network contacts:

- dave.newton@decc.gsi.gov.uk
- pam.wynne@decc.gsi.gov.uk

5. John Welham – Leeds Older People's Forum. (LOPF)

John provided an update on the work of the Leeds Older People's Forum and their success in working with the Local Authority. The City recently hosted an Urban and Ageing Consortium Conference which attracted over 120 delegates from across the country.

One of the key successes of LOPF was securing seats on the Ageing Well Board that feeds into the Health and Wellbeing Board. This close relationship ensures that older people's needs are considered. This supports the positive dialogue with key officers of LCC about the developing City Wide Housing Strategy and the need to clearly address the housing needs and aspirations of

its older citizens. LOPF have developed a housing statement and a manifesto, both of which he will be happy to forward should either be of interest.

Phil Hayes said that DCLG would always be happy to hear from exemplar towns and cities where there are emerging partnerships which focus on the housing needs of older people.

John is also a member of the housing champion's network that is hosted by Care & Repair England. Jane Minter from Care & Repair England drew attention to a recent briefing that they produced. The briefing highlights the main housing reference within the Care Act. (To find out more click the following link)

<http://housingactionblog.wordpress.com/2014/10/30/briefing-on-main-housing-references-in-care-act-2014-guidance-from-care-repair-england/>

6. Alan Clifford – DECC – Fuel Poverty Strategy.

Alan provided further insight into the Fuel Poverty Strategy explaining background and what next.

Background:

The Hills Review went back to first principles, looking at the definition - recognising that the current target was well-meaning but flawed

In July 2013, following consultation, Government adopted Low Income High Cost indicator.

The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 was amended and the 2016 target was repealed.

In July 2014 DECC laid Fuel Poverty (England) Regulations to put in place new target. Also published "cutting the cost of keeping warm" consultation in preparation for strategy.

The statutory target **focuses on improving the energy efficiency** of fuel poor homes. The consultation proposes non-statutory **interim targets** to support the trajectory to 2030: They are: -

- as many ... as is reasonably practicable to Band E by 2020
- as many ... as is reasonably practicable to Band D by 2025

With the final target

- As many fuel poor homes as reasonably practicable to achieve an energy efficiency rating of band C by 2030.

A new fuel poverty strategy for England

The Strategy will set out plans for achieving the target – but it is not the end point. It is not possible or desirable to set the path to 2030 now. There is a need for an on-going strategic approach with regular review points – to take stock of wider developments, progress made, lessons learnt and opportunities to reflect these in policy.

Ultimately all stakeholders will need to continue to work together to find solutions.

DECC intends to hold an annual debate in Parliament on fuel poverty.

Consultation closed on 7 October – 154 responses being analysed
Regulations expected to come into force Autumn 2014 (late November, but subject to Parliamentary timetable).

DECC has stated that the Strategy is expected to be published towards the end of the year – but can only published once Regs are in force.

Maria highlighted some of the key issues that were flagged up in a series of seminars NEA organised to enable local agencies to engage with the consultation. This document was submitted with NEA's response and reflected the views of over 500 individuals representing over 300 agencies. The over-riding issue that was flagged was the need to have a well-resourced national scheme to improve the energy efficiency of the UK housing stock, with a uniform offering for fuel poor households.

AOB

Maria confirmed that NEA had received funding to update the warm homes for older people guide. This would come in an e –format with some hard copies being available.

The agenda item on the Priority Services Register was deferred until the next meeting. Maria will invite a representative from Ofgem to outline their initial reaction to the response to the consultation or indeed their actual response if this is launched by then.

For those interested in understanding a little more about what the individual offers are from fuel suppliers iro the Broader Group a good source of reference is:-

<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2010/10/Energy-suppliers-broader-group-schemes1.pdf>

All felt that in spite of a number of late non attendees the meeting had proved to be thought provoking and informative with a number of potential areas for further exploration

Next meeting tbc – Jan/ Early feb.

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