

Minutes: London Fuel Poverty Partnership

Date: 10 January 2019
Time: 10.00 – 12.00
Location: Amber Infrastructure, 3 More London Riverside, London. SE1 2AQ

Attendees

Shirley Rodrigues, Greater London Authority (Co-chair) - SR
Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Greater London Authority (Co-chair) - DWB
Martin O'Brien, Association of Local Energy Officers London - MOB
Alex Belsham-Harris, Citizens Advice - ABH
Ben Golding, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy - BG
Audrey Gallagher, Energy UK - AG
Cllr Claudia Webbe, London Councils - CW
Dr Jamie-Leigh Ruse, National Energy Action - JLR
Anna Sexton, Public Health England - AS
Dr Mari Martiskainen, University of Sussex Energy Group - MM
Emma Fraser – London Fire Brigade - EF
Helen Newton – London Fire Brigade - HN
GLA officers: John Kolm-Murray - JKM, James Hardy - JH, Dr Fiona Wright – FW, Caitlin Bent – CB

Apologies

Ruth Davison, National Housing Federation
Prof Yvonne Doyle, Public Health England
John Brouder, North East London NHS Foundation Trust
Dermot Nolan, Ofgem
Victoria MacGregor, Citizens Advice
Andy Hearn, London Fire Brigade
Samantha Watkin, Residential Landlords Association
Sarah McClinton, London Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
Hannah Slater, Generation Rent

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 SR welcomed everyone and introductions were made.
- 1.2 SR introduced Debbie Weekes-Bernard, the new Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement and new Co-Chair of the Fuel Poverty Partnership.
- 1.3 SR stressed the importance that the partnership be focused on practical issues and used to develop an agenda for action.

2. Minutes of last meeting, 9 October 2018

- 2.1 Update on actions from 5.10 of previous minutes:
 - JKM confirmed that we do have an advice page on the GLA website which provides links to Citizens Advice and Shelter
Action: JKM to send round link for suggested improvements

- JKM has looked into BRE's excess cold calculator. Currently looking to obtain a free trial of the tool before considering investing in it.
- JKM noted that there is a London Boroughs Private Rented Sector (PRS) Partnership which meets to co-ordinate PRS activities. They are currently scoping a project to build enforcement capacity within boroughs. We are also lobbying for devolving the power of selective licencing to the Mayor – currently this power is with MHCLG but implementation is patchy. JH also noted that Warmer Homes is the first pan-London programme ring-fenced for the private rented sector.

3. Bringing the health sector on board

- 3.1 JLR presented on the **Fuel Poverty Monitor call for evidence** and the **Under One Roof report**.
Action: JLR to send round link to video on the UK Fuel Poverty Monitor
- 3.2 The UK had an extended period of extreme cold weather last year, with health and social care facing unprecedented pressure. There were in excess of 50,000 winter deaths nationwide, around 15,000 of which were attributed to cold homes. Cold homes and regular disconnection of PPMs increases the burden on the NHS, which is anticipating similar pressures this year.
- 3.3 The fuel poverty monitor call for evidence identified:
- There is not enough visibility of support services and difficulties accessing support (e.g. crisis loans)
 - Non-recurrent programmes are problematic – their short-term nature makes it harder to promote what help is available
 - Advice campaigns do not start early enough in the season and there is a lack of multi-lingual campaigns/resources
 - There is a lack of consistency in provision of emergency credit for PPM customers
 - There is variability in the extent to which unregulated fuel providers identify vulnerability. This means they cannot prioritise fuel delivery to vulnerable consumers.
- 3.4 NEA recommend that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland develop comprehensive cold weather plans (similar to England). They also recommend that health and social care agencies enhance their activities to promote NICE guidance.
- 3.5 The **Under One Roof** report looks at how health and social care can work in partnership with fuel poverty alleviation efforts. Investment in fuel poverty is more forthcoming from public health than from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) or the NHS. It can be difficult to engage with the CCGs and NHS, although the new NHS 5-year plan has a heavy focus on prevention which may increase appetite. Public health teams can provide a useful bridge into health bodies like CCGs.
- 3.6 A number of examples of partnerships were presented. A common theme is that often a lot of work is required by a committed individual to make these ventures a success. MOB commented that this reliance on particular individuals highlights a lack of resilience.
- 3.7 Discussion on data:
- JLR: There is quite a lot of work which can be done with existing data held by LAs and health bodies, but using this requires finding individuals with access to the data who can analyse and interpret it. The Cornwall Winter Wellness Programme provides an example of using existing data to calculate the cost savings and health impacts of fuel poverty interventions on hospital admissions. However, the health sector predominantly only recognises scientific evaluation methods

(randomised control trials) – a move towards preventative interventions will require greater use and acceptance of social science research methods.

- MOB commented that data analysis needs to be done by the NHS, as they are unlikely to trust the work of external advocates.
- JH noted that the Department of Health will also have data. BG offered assistance finding out what data DoH have if we are struggling to get information from them.

Action: To follow up with BG if necessary.

- JLR: there is a lot of publicly available data which can still be used by non-specialists, even if public health isn't using it.

3.8 MM noted the importance of linking the community sector to the health sector. JLR agreed that it is important to have flexible, adaptable plans at a very local level, including local contacts which vulnerable residents are aware of. These need to be in place before cold weather hits. Local plans should not be undervalued simply because a national plan is in place.

3.9 Specific areas for London:

- JLR: London needs a coordinated approach for working with CCGs – in light of NHS Long term plan's focus on prevention, CCGs will begin to open up to partnerships with local groups
- CW: Boroughs need a more consistent approach across London. Boroughs already have data, but need help knowing how to use this to effectively target vulnerable customers. The London Councils Transport & Environment Committee could be used to highlight this issue.
- BG: ECO has increased the Local Authority flex element of ECO from 10 to 25 per cent and are keen that low income, vulnerability and health issues go into the criteria for allocating this
- EF: Fire Brigade fire safe and well pilots have been looking at the risk of fuel poverty, since this is often correlated to vulnerability to fire and to carbon monoxide poisoning (due to old heating systems). The availability of assistance and potential for signposting has been very different across the 5 boroughs they have piloted this in.

Action: EF to distribute evaluation report when it is complete.

- MOB: Raised idea of mobilising the public sector in other ways, e.g. using volunteer days to provide co-ordinated support for vulnerable during prolonged periods of cold weather.

Action: To explore how this might work.

- CW: the NEA report has a clear set of guidelines around NICE. We should be pushing all health and wellbeing boards across London to sign up to these.

Action: explore how to use London Councils to raise awareness and get borough commitment to NICE guidance.

- AS: the London Resilience Partnership is keen to push out messages around cold weather and heat.

Action: at the next review of the Severe Weather and Natural Hazards Framework that AS has offered to incorporate case studies of projects that are sent to her by the partnership on fuel poverty initiatives that are taking place in boroughs

4. Debt and disconnection

4.1 Alex Belsham-Harris, Citizens Advice, presented on energy debt and disconnection.

- 4.2 The disconnection rate has never been lower, but self-disconnection remains a serious concern. There was a slight increase in self-disconnection between 2016/17 and 2017/18.
- 4.3 Sixteen per cent of PPM customers self-disconnect each year. Mostly this is because they forgot to top up, but a fifth of these disconnected because they couldn't afford to top-up. 88 per cent of these households contained a child or someone with a health condition.
- 4.4 Customers are not aware of the support available – only 9 per cent of those who disconnected due to affordability contacted their supplier. There is a risk that vulnerable people are building up large arrears because they are not on repayment plans and have low likelihood of contacting their supplier. Suppliers need to adopt a positive tone and constructive approach, rather than formal letters, and ensure there is a clear guarantee of support.
- 4.5 PPMs are most prevalent in social housing. There is a role for LAs and HAs to let their residents know that support is available. The Cold Homes Toolkit provides practical steps LAs can use to improve referral rates.
- 4.6 AG: Energy UK launched the PPM principles in 2019. Currently 13 suppliers are signed up, covering 90 per cent of PPM customers. The principles cover when it's suitable/unsuitable to give someone a PPM, mechanisms around friendly credit etc. It has wide coverage but there is no check on compliance. It is public information as to which suppliers are signed up – if residents are not receiving services in line with these principles LAs could raise lack of compliance.
- 4.7 AG: Ofgem has taken productive steps to reduce installation of PPMs, e.g. a cap on costs companies are able to reclaim. Smart meters are the longer-term answer – this should make PPM tariffs cheaper than direct debits, rather than the other way round, as there is no additional cost to the meter and suppliers have the security of payment in advance. However, given the delays in smart meter roll-out, when will this be a reality?
- 4.8 JKM: people on standard meters who are on the PSR cannot be disconnected during winter; this doesn't apply to PPM customers due to self-disconnection.

5. Progress update

- 5.1 Warmer Homes is continuing, with a good rate of applications received. The FPSF is providing high quality leads meaning the drop-out rate is low. If there is a way of extending this programme in terms of creating a new funding architecture, we would be keen to discuss with BEIS and energy suppliers.
- 5.2 The Fuel Poverty Support Fund Round 2 (2019-2021) will be open for application soon
- 5.3 Fire Brigade will be running events at a number of fire stations in w/c 21st Jan. They will have partners there providing information on debt etc.
Action: JKM to circulate list of events once received from HN
- 5.4 w/c 21st Jan is also Big Energy Saving Week.

6. AOB

- 6.1 None raised.