

Mike Hedges AM
Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

27 February 2020

Sent via email to: Mahima.Khan@assembly.wales

Re: Follow-up to 30th January Committee Session

Dear Mr Hedges,

Thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to inform the Committee's inquiry into fuel poverty in Wales on 30th January.

At the session I offered to provide the Committee with a note outlining some of the relationships and partnerships Energy UK members have with stakeholders in Wales.

As set out in our initial evidence to the Committee, addressing fuel poverty across Wales will require collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders. Energy UK is, therefore, supportive of a partnership approach to addressing fuel poverty and assisting customers in vulnerable circumstances. Addressing fuel poverty will require input from government, the health sector, local authorities, energy suppliers and other parties. The new Welsh fuel poverty strategy should encourage stakeholders to work together to identify households in or at risk of fuel poverty and develop solutions to provide support.

To this end, please find below a number of anonymised examples of the various relationships and partnerships our members have with stakeholders in Wales. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Examples of Relationships and Partnerships

Commission for Customers in Vulnerable Circumstances

In 2018 Energy UK launched the Commission for Customers in Vulnerable Circumstances, to explore how customers in vulnerable circumstances could be provided better energy services in the future.

Independently chaired by Lord Whitty, with five expert Commissioners from a wide range of backgrounds, the Commission published its final report last year. The Commission arrived at seven key themes, leading to a number of recommendations - for suppliers, energy networks, price comparison websites, Energy UK, Ofgem, the UK Government, and Citizens Advice – all of which the Commission believes will lead to better services for customers in vulnerable circumstances.

Energy UK

First Floor
26 Finsbury Square
London EC2A 1DS

T 020 7930 9390
www.energy-uk.org.uk
t @EnergyUKcomms

The report was the culmination of over a year of evidence gathering and engagement with various stakeholders through oral evidence sessions and written submissions from across Great Britain. This included a dedicated oral evidence session in Cardiff, where the Commission was able to hear from expert witnesses and key organisations on the experiences of energy customers in Wales. This included the Fuel Poverty Coalition Wales, the Mental Health and Money Advice Service Wales and the Speakeasy Advice Centre.

The final report can be read here: <https://www.energy-uk.org.uk/our-work/commission-for-customers-in-vulnerable-circumstances.html>

National Energy Action (NEA) Cymru

One large supplier has developed a strong relationship with NEA Cymru, having worked with them closely for a number of years and funded several projects. The member in question currently supports two NEA Cymru projects through its Warm Home Discount (WHD) Industry Initiative funding:

- Partnering with NEA funding their 'Empowering Communities' initiative for Wales, providing energy efficiency training and advice sessions. This has been agreed as multiyear funding meaning this project will continue through 2020-21.
- Providing support to Citizens Advice in England and Wales in a further project providing one to one sessions and income maximisation for those in or at risk of fuel poverty. This will likewise continue through 2020-21.

Local Authorities

Another member currently has three WHD Industry Initiative funded projects that work with Local Authorities across Wales to support customers in need of a range of energy related assistance. The projects are:

- the Emergency Central Heating Offer (ECHO) – ECHO helps to repair or replace broken or condemned boilers;
- the Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) - LEAP provides households with energy efficiency advice, some energy efficiency measures and debt advice; and
- the Home Emergency Appliance Replacement (HEART) – HEART provides energy efficiency advice and support with funding the purchase of white goods.

Local Authority Flexibility (LA Flex)

Under the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO), since 2017, Local Authorities have had the power to widen the eligibility criteria for ECO, allowing them to tailor eligibility of the scheme to their respective area. The power is known as LA Flex.

One Energy UK member has highlighted to us that around a quarter of the ECO energy efficiency measures they have delivered in Wales since late 2018 has been through LA Flex. This has involved

them working with the local authorities in the areas of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys.

Agency Line

One member has established an 'Agency Line' for support agencies working in the community with customers in Wales. The line provides a direct route for local agencies into the supplier's customer relations department so that customer issues can be escalated and dealt with. Organisations making use of the line include: Linc Cymru Housing Association, Gwalia, South East Wales Energy Advice Centre, Carmarthenshire Country Council, Cardiff City Council, Age Concern Cardiff, Action in Caerau and Ely, Warm Wales, Independent Living, North Wales Energy Advice Centre and a number of local Citizen Advice Bureaux across Wales.

Stay Warm This Winter

In January 2020, for the fifth year, the Stay Warm This Winter drop in event for AMs at the Senedd Cymru was hosted by an Energy UK member. Supported by two of the supplier's service and repair engineers, the event was attended by a quarter of Assembly Members, including the Minister for Housing and Local Government. Local politicians will often be the first to be contacted by constituents who are struggling with bills or living in fuel poverty, and, therefore, materials have been developed to help Assembly Members including advice on how people could make their households more energy efficient; smart meters; contacts for teams supporting vulnerable customers as well as signposting additional financial support.

Energy Trusts

One member highlighted that via its energy trust it is currently providing funding to Riverside Advice (Cardiff) and Citizens Advice Cymru. The supplier's vulnerability team also works closely with Cynnal Cymru, Age Cymru and NEA on various initiatives.

I trust you find the information above of use. If you would like to discuss further or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me in the first instance at daniel.alchin@energy-uk.org.uk or on 020 7930 9390.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Alchin

Deputy Director, Retail Policy