Meeting of the Cross Party Group of the Scottish Parliament on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

The lived experience of fuel poverty and the role of those who have experienced fuel poverty in helping to inform programme and policy development – DRAFT MINUTES

17.45pm, Tuesday 5 February 2019

Committee Room 5

The Scottish Parliament

Chair: Liam McArthur MSP

1. Attendees and Presentations

A provisional list of attendees is attached to the end of this note. If you attended and are not shown on the list, please email Elaine Waterson (Elaine.waterson@est.org.uk).

For a copy of the presentations please email Elaine Waterson (Elaine.waterson@est.org.uk).

2. Introduction by Chair and approval of minutes from the last meeting

Liam McArthur MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the last meeting, held on 18 December 2018, had been sent round group members in advance and the secretariat received no requests for additions or corrections. No requests for additions or corrections were made at the meeting. The group agreed that the minutes provided an accurate account of the meeting.

3. Timings of future meetings

Elaine Waterson highlighted that at the last meeting of the group Claudia Beamish, MSP had noted that the last few meetings had not been terribly well attended. She also noted that, the secretariat had received a number of complaints from members that the new evening time made it difficult (or in some cases impossible) for them to attend meetings. She went on to propose that unless there were any objections this would be the last meeting held on a Tuesday evening and that all subsequent meetings would be held on a Thursday lunchtime (between c.12.45pm and 2.00pm). No objections were noted.

4. Topics for future meetings
Elaine Waterson noted that the group was likely to meet another two times before the summer recess and that the group needed to agree topics for these meetings. She went on to note that a number of suggestions had been put forward at the AGM. These were as follows:

- Energy Storage – both electricity and heat. This could include consideration of the contribution storage could make to the reduction of fuel poverty and to grid balancing.
- Grid connection/capacity constraints
- Smart meters and issues associated with switching suppliers
- Publicly owned energy company. This could be part of a wider meeting about alternative ‘empowering’ ownership models.
- Job/training issues associated with the shift to a lower carbon society (‘Just transition’)
- Carbon capture - utilisation and storage
- Hydrogen economy
- Climate Change Bill
- Implications of the closure of the Feed-in Tariff Scheme

Elaine Waterson then asked for comments on these suggestions and for any additional suggestions that members of the group might have.

Support was received for the following topics:

- Hydrogen economy
- Publicly owned energy company
- Battery storage and grid connection for PV

An additional topic was also proposed as follows:

- Floating Offshore wind (with a possible presentation about the Hywind pilot from Equinor)

It was agreed that the topic of the next meeting would be the hydrogen economy and the topic of the subsequent meeting would be the publicly owned energy company followed by meetings on battery storage and grid connection and floating offshore wind. However, the group’s work programme will be reviewed at each meeting to ensure that the group’s plans for subsequent meetings take account of developments that have happened in the intervening period.

5. Presentation – The role of those who have experienced fuel poverty in helping to inform policy and programme development: Energy Action Scotland’s perspective – Norrie Kerr, Energy Action Scotland. Norrie Kerr began his presentation by noting his disappointment that the current fuel poverty debate talks about reduction as opposed to eradication and a target date of 2040. He then asked whether there was a better and more engaging term than ‘lived experience’ that could be used. He went on to discuss two routes through which those living in fuel poverty could provide input into fuel poverty policy and programme development. The first being through Community Planning Partnerships engaging with people about how budgets are spent. He then outlined how communities were engaged in the design of some aspects of the Kilmarnock HEEPS: ABS scheme and highlighted the role that local authorities have to play in helping to understand what communities need. He then discussed a second route through which those living in fuel poverty could provide input into fuel poverty policy and programme development namely through local services. He went on to highlight the importance of listening to people about the issues facing their communities and asked about how we
should do that and about how we should act on the information people provide. He noted that this is something that hasn’t really been done to date and that as a result we are not getting the level of community engagement that we need to have in order to ensure schemes deliver for the communities they are targeted at.

6. Presentation – The Get Heard Scotland Programme and experience from other areas of policy – Neil Cowan, the Poverty Alliance. Neil Cowan began his presentation by highlighting that the Poverty Alliance was a national membership organisation and noting that their membership is made up of a wide range of organisations including grassroots community groups, individuals facing poverty, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, policy makers and academics. He went on to outline the four themes around which their work is centred – incomes, services, attitudes and participation and noted that participation was the most relevant to the meeting’s discussion. He then provided a summary of the new Get Scotland Heard (GHS) Programme. GHS is a three-year programme being developed and delivered by the Poverty Alliance to engage members of communities affected by poverty in the decisions that most impact their lives, and will involve at least 50 community discussion being held across Scotland this year. It will support community and voluntary organisations to contribute to and influence the development of Scottish Government’s Child Poverty Delivery Plan (CPDP) and associated Local Action Plans and contribute to the development of more empowered and engaged communities and individuals on issues of poverty. GHS looks at poverty in the round but fuel poverty will be a major part of work this year because of the Fuel Poverty Bill and also because fuel poverty is an issue that communities have been highlighting as a particular problem. Neil went on to outline a number of interesting fuel poverty insights that have been gained to date from GHS. These are as follows:

- Warmer Homes Scotland programme is very helpful, but there is low awareness of it.
- There are particular issues faced by people with disabilities, e.g. not being able to manage heating controls.
- There are particular issues faced by people with English as a second language, and by people with refugee status. E.g. around switching suppliers.
- New social security powers should be used to boost incomes.

Neil went on to describe how people with experience of using the social security system have been directly involved in designing Scotland’s Social Security Charter and noted that the draft Charter was approved last week. He went on to highlight that different parts of government are now looking at the experience gained from of engaging people with ‘lived experience’ of using the social security system in in the design of Scotland’s Social Security Charter to see what can be learned for other areas of policy and emphasised that there are significant opportunities to embed this approach in other policy areas. Neil concluded by stressing that the involvement of people with experience of fuel poverty should be considered an essential component in efforts (including through the Bill and Strategy) to tackle fuel poverty, given that it both enables people’s right to be involved and that it leads to better policy-making.

7. Presentation – How people’s experiences of living in fuel poverty have informed Greener Kirkcaldy’s work to support the fuel poor – Bruce McCall, Greener Kirkcaldy. Bruce began his presentation by describing the services provided community-led charity Greener Kirkcaldy. These include home energy advice visits, benefit checks and money management advice, free handy service, referrals to other services and the provision of events and talks. Bruce went on to describe in more
detail the advice that Greener Kirkcaldy’s energy advisors are able to provide and noted the formal partnership that Greener Kirkcaldy has with Citizens Advice and Rights Fife which allows them to look all the options around debt management and budgeting, as well as applying to charitable trusts or sequestration if there is no other option. He then described Greener Kirkcaldy’s means tested Handy Service which installs free energy saving measures (including thermal curtains, LED light bulbs, draught proofing and radiator panels) and provides additional support including the provision of fuel top ups and microwave ovens. He went on to highlight the increase in energy visits provided by their Cosy Kingdom Service – a staggering 154% increase in the number of energy visits over the last three years (from 679 visits in 2015/16 to 1,728 visits in 2017/18). He went on to note that they are increasingly undertaking more complex and in-depth visits in response to need.

6. Question and Answer Session

Liam McArthur asked attendees to show their appreciation for the presenters.

A range of questions were directed at the panel; please note that the intention of this meeting note is not to record a verbatim account of the meeting. Questions posed to the panel and answers received included:

- **John Birchmore** – suggested that the Scottish Government also needs think at a macro level and should be setting targets for the recovery of waste heat. He went on to propose that Scottish Government procurement needs to change.

- **Liam McArthur** – noted that risk aversion was a common theme and went on to ask if any of the speakers wanted to pick up on the heat generation dimension of fuel poverty.

- **Norrie Kerr** – agreed that the decarbonisation of heat was a big issue and noted the importance of a ‘just transition’. He highlighted the need to ensure that the cost of programmes don’t have a negative impact on the cost of energy delivered to consumers and in this context noted that he understood why the government is risk averse.

- **Liam McArthur** – asked about the way in which building regulations are structured noting that renewables were being incorporated into buildings that were not as energy efficient as they could be.

- **Norrie Kerr** – agreed that a change in building regulations would be helpful and suggested that new homes should be designed so they do not need heating systems.

- **David Schofield** – noted that people are not participating in policy making and that these are not choices that consumers are currently being given. He also highlighted the need to make the system more participatory.

- **Barbara Whiting** – asked how we decarbonise but also keep costs down.

- **Liam McArthur** – asked if the demise of Our Power was likely to have any impact on householders’ built in reluctance to switch supplier.

- **Norrie Kerr** – noted that in Scotland SSE has c.75% of their original customer base. He then highlighted the large difference between the generation cost of electricity and the wholesale cost and asked about the market in the middle. He went on to note that switching rates have fallen as a result of the price cap as people think they will no longer be overcharged for energy and as such do not need to switch supplier.

- **Norrie Kerr** – asked why homes that rely on electric heating, oil and LPG are still being designed noting that the market is not serving individual households/communities which is why people are looking at generating power locally.

- **Norrie Kerr** – asked about how we can disrupt the market.

- **Liam McArthur** – asked where a publicly owned energy company (POEC) fits in.
• **Keith Baker** – noted that the infrastructure for switching is outdated and asked about the capacity of the fuel poor to engage. He went on to note that the Common Weal have a paper coming out about the proposed POEC which recommends that a Scottish Energy Development Agency be developed alongside the POEC to ensure that better outcomes for communities.
• **Liam McArthur** – suggested that sometimes it was difficult to create public awareness about the services/support that is already in place and asked the panel about how the existing framework could be more user friendly.
• **Bruce McCall** – outlined Greener Kirkcaldy’s street by street approach which aims to get to hard to treat participants. This involves leaflet drops followed up by door knocking.
• **Laura McGadie** – noted that Home Energy Scotland (HES) provides safety net home visits where local/regional provision does not exist. She went on to mention the recent HES Home Care pilot which was delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government in two very rural areas. She noted that one of the biggest issues the pilot faced was disrepair - with householders who were eligible for grants unable to take these up as installation of measures wasn’t possible until the disrepair had been tackled. She then asked the panel about the extent to which they have found disrepair to be a problem when they visit people’s homes?
• **Bruce McCall** – noted that Fife Kingdom Care and Repair was able to, at a flat charge of £25, visit homes and undertake some repairs (for example to boilers).
• **Neil Cowan** – confirmed that disrepair in homes where people could not afford necessary repairs is an issue that the Poverty Alliance had come across. He went on to note that there is a lack of awareness of Warmer Homes Scotland amongst those who live in poverty and highlighted that if someone is living in poverty then energy efficiency is not always at the top of people’s priorities.
• **Norrie Kerr** – suggested that the problem of disrepair will get more acute with an ageing population and went on to suggest that a major policy shift was required in terms of how local authorities are funded.

7. AOB

Liam McArthur asked attendees to, once again, show their appreciation for the presenters. He went on to thank everyone for their attendance at, and participation during the meeting and noted that Elaine Waterson would be in touch with members of the group to confirm the dates of future meetings.

8. Attendees

**Members – Cross Party Group on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency**

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**Non-member guests**

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For suggestions of corrections for this note please contact the secretariat, Elaine Waterson (Elaine.waterson@est.org.uk).