Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad i Dlodi Tanwydd | Inquiry into Fuel Poverty
FP 08
Ymateb gan : Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili
Evidence from : Caerphilly County Borough Council

The scale and impact of fuel poverty in Wales

WG have already indicated that approximately 12% of households remain in fuel poverty, which is linked to reducing income levels, increasing living costs and increasing fuel costs. The figures are disappointing when considering all the investment being made into homes within Wales, particularly as we near the end of the WHQS programme nationally, but it is accepted that this is a problem in the private sector as well as social housing.

Fuel poverty will obviously impact on people's wellbeing, health and the living environment and we hear of incidents whereby households need to make a choice of whether to put food on the table, buy clothes for the children or heat the home. Poverty can also result in increased instances of anti-social behaviour and crime outside the home, impact on children's education and contribute to problems with condensation, dampness and respiratory problems within the home. This results in increased resources being called upon in the public sector including the health service, social services and housing services to name a few.

Why the WG failed to meet its statutory target of eradicating fuel poverty in Wales by 2018

This is a question that WG should answer but a number of reasons could include the following:-

- Changes to the welfare system which have been outside of WG's control.
- Climate change.

- Problems with previous initiatives aimed at improving thermal efficiency of homes e.g. cavity wall insulation, air source heat pumps, solar panels, technology.
- Cost of energy efficiency work and new technology.
- Cultural and intergenerational issues with many failing to engage to seek employment to increase income.
- Lack of understanding, training/educating of households to optimise the use of energy and new technologies within the home.
- Limitations of existing housing stocks which fail to lend themselves to some of the more cost effective energy efficiency solutions.
- Funding has been an issue whilst organisations have focused on achieving WHQS which has perhaps limited the extent of energy efficiency work undertaken in the public sector. Also delays have been incurred through the bidding and approval process of some schemes e.g. Arbed, together with tight timelines for completion which has resulted in work being undertaken in the worst weather periods of the year, work being rushed to meet the deadline leading to quality issues.
- Designing with energy efficiency in mind is far easier than retrofitting and more cost effective.
- Energy companies need to play their part and increase the offer of 'green' energy and reduce costs to customers.
- The increase in reliance on the private rented sector, particularly for low income households and the reluctance of some landlords to invest in energy efficiency measures that would benefit their tenants.
- The lack of success of the 'Green deal' initiative.

How WG action to date has helped to combat fuel poverty, in particular, the impact of the Warm Homes Programme and WHQS

The energy efficiency initiatives introduced and supported by WG such as NEST, Arbed and WHQS, would clearly have had a positive impact on addressing fuel poverty, but the actual impact is not known at a local level as it is only available on a national level.

Support is provided across both public and private sector with advice, financial assistance or specific schemes and more recently this has looked at

an holistic approach across an area which is of great assistance. It is often not practical to try to target social or private housing in isolation.

How the WG's successor to the fuel poverty strategy, should differ from it's 2010 strategy

WG need to consider the cost of retrofitting to improve energy efficiency as in some cases the cost can be higher than the property value.

We agree with the fabric first approach where possible, particularly for the elderly and social housing, as many appear to struggle with new technology or fail to use systems correctly which can actually increase their costs or lead to other problems as mentioned above.

A number of initiatives have been tried and tested, is there clear evidence to suggest what has worked well and what has not? For example we have used air source heat pumps and electric heating systems within Caerphilly, but we have encountered problems with both resulting in their replacement. EWI seems to be applied extensively nationwide, but again the longterm sustainability of this is not known and we are also encountering problems with some EWI installations within Caerphilly.

There is real concern in relation to the delivery of new social housing in particular that the increased requirement for improved quality, DQR, fire safety, SABS and energy efficiency will impact on the viability of some sites, with the pressure being applied to the level of social housing that can be provided.

The attainment of carbon neutral homes will be extremely difficult without the contribution from energy providers to deliver green energy.

There needs to be a consensus on the definition and interpretation of 'carbon neutral', 'carbon positive' etc across organisations.

Can energy targets for homes be offset by other measures e.g water recycling, planting trees particularly for some sites or properties which may struggle technically and financially to deliver on the targets?

What research has taken place to determine the carbon contribution of the delivery process e.g. obtaining and transportation of raw products, manufacturing of EWI, transportation and storage of manufactured products, installation, maintenance and how long it would take to turn this into a benefit?

What steps the WG should take to ensure that new build homes, as well as existing homes, are highly energy efficient to prevent them causing fuel poverty in the future.

Suitability - as we have found with CWI - the solution might not be the right one for the geographical area. It is important that the right solutions are chosen for the right geographical area.

The use of technology needs to be easy to understand and user friendly, taking into account all prospective and existing households

Consider the impact that improved quality and energy efficiency will have on the number of homes being delivered

Review schemes completed under the IHP and establish what has worked well, if it is affordable and if costs can be reduced to make the wider roll out affordable

Energy providers and manufacturers need to play their part in contributing towards carbon neutral homes

The whole construction and retrofit journey should be taken into account, as well as the life time use of the home to determine energy efficiency.

Provide unambiguous definitions of terms such as carbon neutral for use across the sector so that accurate comparisons can be made.

Consider options for dealing with existing homes which may be problematic from a practical, technical and financial perspective.

Consider how the impact of fuel poverty can be measured and provide clear and consistent guidance on how it can be tackled, as this is not purely a housing related issue.

Hard to treat properties are often easier to improve when the property is vacant. Could funding be made available to target such properties when these circumstances present themselves, e.g. internal insulation?

Improve energy advice and ensure this is targeted at those identified as potentially being in fuel poverty.