

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 07

Ymateb gan : Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Evidence from : Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Fuel poverty remains a significant issue for older people with the latest figures showing that there are around 88,000 older households living in fuel poverty.¹ This is despite a statutory duty to eradicate fuel poverty in the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, and a Welsh Government commitment that, as far as reasonably practicable, no-one in Wales will be living fuel poverty by 2018.²

Whilst the number of households in Wales living in fuel poverty has halved over the last ten years,³ as a result of the Warm Homes Programme and the introduction of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, it is concerning that so many older people continue to live in fuel poverty, potentially choosing between heating their homes and eating properly.

The Welsh Government's new strategy to tackle fuel poverty should continue to build upon the successes of the 'person-centred' tailored advice and referral/signposting service that the Nest programme has been developing alongside its voluntary sector partners over recent years and must include benefit entitlement checks.

It is important not to 'decouple' fuel poverty from the wider issue of poverty amongst older people. In excess of 20% of older people are living in relative income poverty in Wales and for many older people, the long winter months provide unavoidable dilemmas about whether to heat or eat,⁴ with 25% of older people buying cheaper food or less of it.

Increasing household income is a major factor in preventing fuel poverty and it is essential that older people are fully aware of all financial entitlements that they qualify for and are encouraged to take-up these entitlements. It is estimated that up to £214m of Pension Credit goes unclaimed every year in Wales.⁵

Older people with a pension income of less than £167.25 (£255.25 for

couples) may be eligible to a Pension Credit payment which would top up their income. The average amount received by those claiming is £58 per week which can make a difference to their income of around £3,000 a year. Claiming Pension Credit can also unlock a range of other entitlements such as council tax discounts, free dental treatment and help with housing costs.

Increasing benefit take-up would be a significant way of tackling fuel poverty among some of the poorest older people and the new strategy must further build upon the success of the benefit entitlement checks and support measures achieved to date.

The new strategy must further enhance diverse referral routes and partnership involvement through local authorities, primary and secondary health services, third sector organisations and charities in order to identify and reach out to those vulnerable households still living in fuel poverty.

In order to ensure that new-build homes are highly energy efficient Welsh Government should maintain an overview so that all housing developments comply with Planning Policy Wales, which states that ‘the planning system must enable provision of a range of well-designed, energy efficient, good quality market and affordable housing that will contribute to the creation of sustainable places’.⁶

Finally, given the numbers of vulnerable households still living in fuel poverty, the strategy must contain a clearly defined work programme for both its schemes. The work programmes should have meaningful milestones, describing by how much and by when it intends to reduce levels of fuel poverty on an annual basis.

Progress/contribution against the milestones should be reflected in each scheme’s annual report.

I hope that these comments are helpful.

¹ Welsh Government. (2019). *Fuel poverty estimates for Wales: 2018*; <http://bit.ly/2myTQvS>

² Welsh Government. (2010). *Fuel Poverty Strategy 2010*; p.7; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2lCm5cQ>

³ Welsh Government. (2019). *Fuel poverty estimates for Wales: 2018*; <http://bit.ly/2myTQvS>

⁴ Age Cymru. (2014). *AMs discuss fuel poverty among older people in Wales*; <http://bit.ly/2mEto3l>

⁵ Independent Age. (2019). *Pension Credit: A closer look*. <http://bit.ly/2mFWIXz>

⁶ Welsh Government. (2018). *Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10*; <https://bit.ly/2kGcxNn>