

Update on London Fuel Poverty Partnership Working Groups

Background on the Working Groups

Four working groups have been established to meet the challenges facing fuel poor households in London across four strategic theme:

- Cost of Living (NEA led)
- Health (NHS led)
- Decarbonisation (ADE led)
- Private Rented Sector (GLA led)

The table below shows the main objectives for each group as well as the members.

Group	Objective	Members
Cost of Living	Alleviation of immediate cost of living crisis and prevention of self-disconnection	NEA Ofgem Citizens Advice Toynbee Hall Runnymede Trust Energy UK DESNZ GLA
Health	Reduced excess winter deaths and hospital admissions resulting from cold homes	NHS England OHID ADPH London NEA LFP
Decarbonisation	Helping the GLA to achieve a just transition to net zero	ADE NHF NEA DESNZ
Private Rented Sector	Helping the GLA to ensure that all privately rented homes reach EPC C by 2030	GLA NRLA DESNZ Generation Rent ALEO NEA

An update on the context, as well as progress made in each of these groups, is detailed below.

Cost of Living

Context

- The cost of living continues to be a significant concern for Londoners, and along with housing and food costs, energy costs are still a major contributing factor.
- Compared to the winter, the price that households have paid for energy in April-July this year has increased. While wholesale prices has fallen, support from the UK Government with bills has dropped off too.
- From July, with wholesale prices continuing to fall, the price cap will fall too. However, it will not fall to pre-crisis levels. The prices that households are exposed to will remain at winter 2022/23 levels (taking into account Government support)
- The Energy Bill Support Scheme has, on the whole, been a success. However, that cannot be said for everyone. Households using legacy prepayment meters (of which there are 350,000) have often struggled to redeem their vouchers. As per the latest statistics in April, £40m worth of vouchers had been left unredeemed in London.
- Additionally, as we exit winter, many households will start to be in arrears, entering debt repayment plans. In 2022, there were >60k energy related warrants for entry of homes granted in London, either to forcibly install a prepayment meter, or to collect debt through other means. Ofgem have now paused all forced installations of prepayment meters, and introduced a new voluntary code of practice (which is intended to become part of the licence before winter)

Activity in the Group

- The Cost of Living WG continues to identify ways through which we can help Londoners with the cost of living crisis with the resource available to us.
- In our discussions, there were 3 main challenges we wanted to address. Firstly, the uptake of EBSS vouchers in London. Secondly, to ensure that Londoners know their rights with regard to forced installs of prepay meters. Thirdly, to bring together London based fuel poverty organisations ahead of what would be another difficult winter winter
- Increasing uptake of EBSS vouchers
 - NEA attended a meeting with Minister Solloway to discuss this issue, and fed back the concerns and ideas from the CoL working group. This has culminated in the UK Government looking to hold an awareness day in June. NEA will be supporting. [Discussion point on how the LFPP can support too]
 - One practical output of the meeting was how we could use our phone lines to ensure that those waiting for advice got information automatically in the waiting queue. We have done this, and I understand Debt Free London have done this too.
 - Energy Suppliers have also taken action
 - Regular reminders via sms, email, letter etc - *the most effective channels have been emails, SMS and postcards (to mitigate the issue you highlighted of customers not opening their mail)*
 - Calls and homes visits – proactively going door to door, which has in some cases revealed that properties had become vacant - *home visits haven't resulted in significant uptake afterwards, meaning the resource/impact isn't equal*
 - Incorporating EBSS checks into scripts for all inbound calls from PPM customers, regardless of the issue, and ensuring call centre staff have access to PayPoint database so they can check directly
 - Proactively reissuing unredeemed vouchers which have expired – *adopting data-led approaches to proactively reach out where people have claimed some months but not others*
 - Webforms so people can put details in online for reissue without having to wait on phone or chat – *this approach addresses the barrier you identified of long waiting times on the phone*
 - Liaising and partnering with third parties (paypoint, housing associations) to promote awareness
 - Moving customers to smart PPM then vending the EBSS – can back date to receive all the payments for duration customer has been with supplier
- Increasing awareness in London of new rights re forced installation of prepayment meters

- NEA and Ofgem have agreed to work together to produce a briefing that can be disseminated to
- NEA will also run a webinar in the summer to disseminate this information further
- [Discussion point – is it worth doing anything directly with Londoners?]
- Bringing Organisations together
 - NEA currently recruiting a new Local Authority Coordinator, which will initially be focussed on supporting the partnership. Once this has been completed, we will work with GLA to organise an event for on the ground orgs in London ahead of winter.

Health

Context

- Over the winter, the health working group identified opportunities to increase the awareness of fuel poverty and support schemes with health professionals in London. While we were able to reach individuals with information, its important to measure the success of this and how it can be improved.
- We heard in the last meeting that so much good can come out of social prescribing (in the Warmth on Prescription element of the scheme). It is important to ensure that this group keeps in touch with that project, and with social prescribers in London in general.
- Ofgem's new code of practice regarding forced installations of prepayment meters includes exemptions from the process for households that meet certain health criteria. It is important that this is informed by health professionals, and this group has a role to play in ensuring that the final code of practice in the supply licences is as good as possible.

Activity in the Group

- The Health WG continues to identify ways through which we can help Londoners with the cost of living crisis with the resource available to us.
- In our discussions, we looked to address 3 main challenges.. Firstly, learning the lessons of last winter and integrating health into broader discussions in London. Secondly, continuing to support the efforts of social prescribers in London including the 'Warmth on Prescription' project. And third, supporting Ofgem with their work on the code of practice for forced installations of smart meters.
- Learning lessons and integration
 - The group looked to understand the effectiveness of our communications last winter, and to understand how this can be improved next winter.
 - The group has also been linked into London Health Board's task and finish group, that is acting on the recommendations of a new Institute of Health Equity report.
- Supporting social prescribers
 - There have been a continued engagement with the social prescriber network in London.
 - The warmth on prescription project continues and will be in a better place to report on outcomes in the next plenary meeting.
- Supporting Ofgem with their work on forced prepayment meters
 - Coordination of health professionals in responding to an initial health focused call for input from Ofgem.

Decarbonisation

Context

- There is now a significant amount of national funding to help households across Great Britain to decarbonise their homes.
 - The ECO4 scheme, aimed at low income households, has £1bn/year worth of funding until April 2026. This helps households with whole house retrofit. It is mostly aimed at on-gas households
 - The Home upgrade grant scheme has overall committed over £1bn until the end of this parliament. It is aimed a low income households off the gas grid and helps with whole house retrofit.
 - The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund helps social housing providers to decarbonise their housing stock. £100ms has been committed so far.
- While significant amounts of funding is available, it is not necessarily working for Londoners.
- At a national level, ECO 4 is under-delivering.
 - Following delays to the introduction of the fourth phase of ECO, the scheme is yet to reach its full potential.
 - The previous phase of the ECO scheme version (ECO 3) was replaced by the ECO 4 in April 2022. Since then, the number of installations made under ECO have fallen off a cliff-edge.
 - There were nearly 80,000 measures in 30,000 homes by the end of January. This is 6.6% of the 450,000 homes ECO4 was estimated to be able to support, in the first 6 months of the four year scheme.
 - This is compounded by difficulties in the supply chain. There are now fewer than 10,000 people involved in the industry and public-funded schemes, whereas in 2012 there was 54,000.
- Some of the national level issues with delivery include:
 - Meeting the minimum requirements to improve properties by multiple EPC bands is too expensive for most properties.
 - A diminishing supply chain
 - Outdated cost assumptions making it hard to improve homes within the allocated budget
- And this is compounded by issues more specific to London.
 - 14.5% of all fuel poor households in England live are located in London. When accounting for Scotland and Wales, Londoners represent ~10% of fuel poor households across Great Britain.
 - However, since the inception of the ECO scheme in 2013, only 7.2% of measures have been received by Lononders. And in recent quarters, only ~3% of measures have gone to London
 - The LFPP believes that some of the local level delivery levels include:
 - Issues with data sharing between LAs and London leading to delays of 'Statements of Intent' (local authority eligibility)
 - Low uptake for PRS Homes
 - Bias towards on gas homes mean off gas Londoners miss out on support
- Additionally, the Home Upgrade Grant Scheme, in its latest round of funding, was not favourable to London. Of ~£580m allocated, only £12m (2%) has gone to London. This is well short of what Londoers might have expected, given the proportion of fuel poor households that live in London, and the proportion of households in London off the gas grid (in apartments etc)
- Aside from funding, London faces a strategically difficult challenge when it comes to balancing the need to rapidly decarbonise with addressing fuel poverty. In some ways, this is addressed through prioritising low income households for home improvements, as is done in both national and local decarbonisation schemes.
- However, when it comes to decarbonising heating, there is a particular challenge. While there is a need to, on the whole, move away from gas heating towards more sustainable solutions, gas remains the cheapest way for many to heat their homes.
- And in the case of an emergency scenario, with a broken boiler, a replacement boiler can be fitted much more quickly than a new electrical heating system, which can take days to install. This is an

issue in the cold of winter. There is a need to find solutions to these issues in the context of the Mayor's plans to decarbonise in a fair and affordable way,

Activity in the Group

- The Decarbonisation WG continues to identify ways through which we can help Londoners to decarbonise in a fair and affordable way.
- In our discussions, there were 3 main challenges we wanted to address. Firstly, ensuring that national schemes work for Londoners. Secondly, finding the balance between decarbonising at pace and helping fuel poor households. And third, to showcase the good work that has been done in London as part of an effort to secure more national level support.
- Ensuring national schemes work for Londoners
 - Adding a new urban uplift to the scheme, so that metropolitan areas can more readily access the scheme. This should match the rural uplift that is currently found within the scheme.
 - Revising cost assumptions in line with the Great British Insulation Scheme to ensure the economics of ECO 4 stack up: This may include needing to reduce the scheme in size to reflect the actual costs of delivering ECO 4 and accepting it will be a smaller volume of homes treated as was in the initial consultation for the scheme and the cost will be higher in particular for smaller homes.
 - Extending ECO 4 to allow the revision of cost assumptions and/or targets and give industry time to catch up from the slow start.
 - Making long-term funding available for training to boost the supply chain in the long-term and consider measures to boost recruitment and careers in the retrofit industry to boost the supply chain for the long-term.
 - Engaging with industry: Coordinate a roundtable with installers, energy suppliers and other industry and fuel poverty experts to agree necessary changes to ECO 4.
 - Reforming local delivery channels to reflect real-life circumstances and regional differences, including:
 - Accelerating data sharing agreement so ensure that LAs can set up their own eligibility criteria and qualify local households.
 - Simplifying the approach to LA delivery such that Ofgem can only reject declarations from local authorities if they are found to be fraudulent rather than poorly evidenced, as this creates unnecessary risk and impacts lead generation.
 - Widening the eligibility of homes so that socially and privately rented homes can more easily access support
- finding the balance between decarbonising at pace and helping fuel poor households
 - The group is working with the GLA to identify which households potentially should be eligible for emergency boiler repair and replacements in London. Initial idea was that this could be a health based criteria as per the Ofgem CoP
 - Need to link in with the Health WG if we pursue this
 - Also an idea that would be a pool of boilers that could be used in emergencies if heat pumps are not suitable for a quick install
 - Need to ensure that heat pumps can be installed quicker in the future.
- Showcasing the good work that has been done in London as part of an effort to secure more national level support
 - NEA has just secured funding to continue our fair and affordable transition advocacy programme.
 - This will include expanding our case study database (focussing on the PRS but also looking at other tenures as well) to tell the stories of households who have successfully decarbonised their homes
 - We are keen to have a strong London presence in these case studies - please do get in touch if you think you can help.

Private Rented Sector

Context

- Privately rented housing remains a stubborn obstacle with respect to both decarbonisation goals and to meeting fuel poverty targets
- The UK Government has still not made any response to its 2019 consultation on introducing tougher standards for private renters through an extended Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard, which would require all landlords to ensure their properties meet EPC C by 2028.
- The Renters Reform Bill, which has now been introduced to parliament, makes a little bit of progress on this. If passed, it would extend the decent home standard to all privately rented properties (it currently only applies to socially rented homes). While there is no explicit energy efficiency standard in the DHS, there are some implications with regards to energy. Homes must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort through:
 - A requirement for a dwelling to have both efficient heating; and effective insulation.
 - Efficient heating means any gas or oil programmable central heating; or electric storage heaters; or warm air systems; or underfloor systems; or programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating; or similarly efficient heating systems which are developed in the future
 - The primary heating system must have a distribution system sufficient to provide heat to two or more rooms of the home. There may be storage heaters in two or more rooms, or other heaters that use the same fuel in two or more rooms. Even if the central heating system covers most of the house making a dwelling decent, under the HHSRS a landlord must be sure that the home is warm enough for the occupant.
 - Heating sources which provide less energy efficient options fail the Decent Homes standard.
 - In terms of insulation
 - For dwellings with gas/oil programmable heating, cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively) or at least 50mm loft insulation (if there is loft space) is an effective package of insulation; and
 - For dwellings heated by electric storage heaters/LPG/programmable solid fuel central heating a higher specification of insulation is required: at least 200mm of loft insulation (if there is a loft) and cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively).
 - A SAP rating of less than 35 (using the 2001 SAP methodology) has been established as a proxy for the likely presence of a Category 1 hazard from excess cold
 - Loft insulation thickness of 50mm is a minimum designed to trigger action on the worst housing. Where insulation is being fitted, landlords should take the opportunity to improve the energy efficiency and install insulation to a much greater depth.

Activity in the Group

- There is a concerted effort to lobby the UK Government to improve the situation of energy efficiency in the private rented sector.
- We understand that an amendment will be laid by the opposition in the Energy Bill that would bring the PRS MEES EPC C consultation position into force.
- There is also work to ensure that the Renters Reform Bill includes this requirement if the Energy Bill amendment fails
- NEA has been granted funding to address this as part of its 'fair and affordable transition to net zero' advocacy work. This will include:
 - Producing briefings for MPs based on evidence in their constituencies
 - Extending our a bank of case studies demonstrating a) successful decarbonisation of privately rented homes from the tenants point of view; b) successful decarbonisation of privately rented homes from the landlords point of view; c) privately rented homes that are still inefficient (tenant's view); and d) privately rented homes that are still inefficient (landlord's view)
 - Disseminating findings from our own and others' work

- Enhancing existing coalitions, ensuring that messaging on improving privately rented homes is consistent across green NGOs, charities that focus on the cost of living and organisations that focus on housing.
- Enhancing proactive media/public affairs coordination with our partners through a common set of media/political touchpoints.
- Enhancing reactive media/public affairs coordination with our partners through a common understanding of unhelpful media narratives and their counter arguments
- Press releases throughout the year to gain positive media traction in the right wing press (particularly targeting the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Express) regarding our asks.
- Providing resources for other organisations to use in responses to consultations