



## CAN Training Day Conference, Manchester, 9 May 2014

### 1. Introduction

This document summarises discussions from two workshop sessions held as part of the Carbon Action Network Training Day Conference in Manchester on 9 May 2014. The workshops addressed the issue of fuel poverty and sought to gather the views, ideas and concerns of local authorities and others on the likely direction of the forthcoming Fuel Poverty Strategy. The workshops were facilitated by Liz Warren of SE<sup>2</sup>.

The report starts with a set of recommendations drawn from recurring comments at the workshops. These recommendations can help translate national policy into local delivery. The report then recounts specific discussion points raised by participants in the workshops.

### 2. Recommendations

Recommendation	Rationale	Who?
<b>LIHC definition; overall target; monitoring</b>		
Provide examples of the new LIHC definition in use	Authorities feel that the new definition is hard to explain or to use for targeting	DECC to provide ideas for how the definition can be used in practice  CAN could gather more ideas about this from LAs that are using the definition for targeting.
Maintain senior buy-in to the issue of fuel poverty	There is concern that the new definition (and subsequent reduction in the number of households classed as fuel poor) will make it seem “less of an issue” in some areas.	Government / LGA to communicate at senior level in local authorities to ensure focus on fuel poverty is sustained
Monitoring needs to be appropriate, proportionate and resourced	The approach to monitoring in the Fuel Poverty Strategy needs to be clearly defined so that local authorities know what is expected of them and can dedicate appropriate resources. There was concern that monitoring distracts from delivery.	DECC to clarify who will monitor what within the Strategy and to ensure that, if there are monitoring burdens on LAs, these are appropriately resourced.
<b>Policy mix</b>		
Provide longer term policy and funding timeframes	Authorities would welcome a longer timeframe for fuel poverty policy, for example, commitment that it will remain a policy priority for a number of years, and funding schemes that allow a long-term approach to tackling the problem rather than “subsidy chasing”.	The Strategy could set out a long-term commitment to the issue. Cross-party consensus is valuable.  Recognising that funding can appear at short notice, DECC could communicate more effectively about what is available, when, and ensure that delivery timetables build a steady market, rather than a stop / start market.
Recognise and manage policy conflicts	It was felt that too much is being asked of certain policy instruments (particularly ECO). Carbon saving and tackling fuel poverty do not always go hand in hand, and authorities can	DECC to consider role of policies and whether clearer definition of policy objectives will support local delivery.



	struggle to deliver effectively on both fronts.	
Recognise the impact that subsidy can have on targeting	Targeting of fuel poverty is highly subsidy-driven (eg, CSCO areas have had a lot of targeting because the funding has been more accessible). That said, area-based approaches - which have historically worked well - are becoming less effective (outside CSCO areas) as delivery organisations are “cherry picking”. Local authorities struggle with this as they want to provide a “universal offer”.	DECC to recognise this as an issue and to consider how area-based approaches and community energy are best delivered in line with incentive and subsidy programmes.  CAN to work with LAs in light of the new target to look at whether more targeted approaches are better for delivering what is required under the new approach / target regime.
Identify funding for behaviour change	A lot of fuel poverty funding is directed towards capital measures. Authorities would like to carry out more advice and behaviour change work, but this is not as easily funded.	DECC to consider opportunities for behaviour change funding (perhaps as part of obligations).  CAN to identify and promote sources of funding which may be appropriate for behaviour change (eg, EU funding) and support LAs to work together to secure resources.
<b>Targeting</b>		
Produce a tool to help identify householders in fuel poverty under the new definition	Local authorities find it hard to know which households are in fuel poverty under the new definition (despite there being some clear characteristics).	DECC (or CAN) to look at tools which can help with this, both at an area level and at an individual householder level.
Better data about the private sector (especially the PRS)	Local authorities struggle to find data about which properties are privately rented and who the landlords are.	DECC’s forthcoming private rented sector consultation should consider data issues alongside energy ratings and right to request.  CAN should share experiences of LAs in developing private sector databases, perhaps linked with other LA responsibilities (such as HHSRS)
Disseminate experiences of data sharing	Local authorities know that there are good examples of data sharing happening but do not know what they are. They are also anxious about data protection issues.	Carbon Action Network should gather and disseminate experiences of data sharing



### 3. Low Income / High Cost Approach; Overall Target; Monitoring

Participants were asked to consider the new definition of fuel poverty, how a new overall target for reducing fuel poverty might work, and the approach to monitoring laid out in DECC's Fuel Poverty Framework.

The questions posed were:

**What impact will the new definition and a change in target have on your local authority's strategic approach to fuel poverty?**

- It is very difficult to explain the new definition (the old definition was conceptually simpler to understand)
- The new definition gives us less traction: the number of fuel poor households is lower than it was, meaning that it might be seen as less of an issue
- Buy-in at corporate level if the number of people in fuel poverty drops
- Fuel poverty is already quite hidden. The new definition makes it harder to track down. How do we identify the fuel poor cohort using the new definition?
- It is already hard to find people in fuel poverty. The new definition does not make things easier.
- SAP ratings are difficult to obtain and not always accurate,
- When fuel poverty decreases "slightly", will the focus on it decrease?
- The definition will be used for policy but not for delivery

**Is the suggested approach to monitoring too much? Not enough? About right? What could be added? What could be removed?**

- The new definition makes it harder to measure who is in fuel poverty
- Even if fuel poverty can be measured / identified, what help can be given to fuel poor households (ie, in the absence of funding)?
- Monitoring needs appropriate resource of its own
- Monitoring is an expensive distraction from work

**What would be on your wish list related to the definition, the overall target and monitoring?**

- A list of privately rented properties in order to target them
- Government to stand firm on EPC ratings as minimum standards for the private rented sector
- A comprehensive private sector database and access to the data
- Health improvement
- An holistic approach encompassing actual behaviour change and proper financial inclusion
- A better minimum rating to aim for

### 4. Policy Mix

Participants were asked to think about the policy mix suggested by the Fuel Poverty Framework. This focused on energy efficiency improvements through existing policies and with more targeted delivery, and on mechanisms for direct support with energy bills (eg, rebates). Delegates were also asked to think about other options: tariff reform, behavioural advice and community energy.

The questions posed were:

**How would you adapt current policies to make them more effective at tackling severe fuel poverty?**

- Less is more
- One size does not fit all - what are the local implications of national policy?
- There are conflicts within policy: reducing carbon emissions is not always aligned with tackling fuel poverty; health policy is not always compatible with asset management



- Policy has no longevity when there is a five-year election cycle (or even within the lifetime of one Government)
- Simplify and combine policies
- Enable data sharing where possible
- Rebates / discounts should be credited to people's energy accounts, either directly or through vouchers. This helps to ensure that money is spent on the priority (warmth) rather than on other things.
- Approaches and help should be targeted at those most in need
- Local authorities should have a statutory duty to provide help / assistance / guidance (eg, through statutory HECA duty), with funding to support this

**Is the emphasis on improving energy efficiency and providing rebates on energy bills the right approach? Why / why not?**

- Behaviour change - recognising that fuel poverty is often about under-use and that consumption may well go up after interventions (which acts against carbon reduction policy)

**What would you want to see added to DECC's policy mix?**

- Clearer definition of fuel poverty
- Smart meter roll-out should be more than about fitting them; it should also include education / advice
- A wider role for the energy companies? They are very target driven. Could they do more on community engagement, advice, behaviour change?
- Cheaper energy causes its own problems (eg, in terms of increased consumption pushing up carbon emissions). What other pricing options are there, eg, social tariffs?
- Listen to those who are doing the job when carrying out consultations

**What could you do locally (ie, without additional national policy)? What would help you to achieve this?**

- Engaging with local communities
- Providing help and advice
- Increasing education and behaviour change

## **5. Targeting of support**

Participants were given an insight into the types of buildings and households likely to fall within the new LIHC definition of fuel poverty. They were asked to consider issues including data sharing, targeting, area-based approaches and how vulnerability aligns with LIHC.

The questions posed were:

**How well does your current approach to targeting line up with the LIHC definition? How might your approach to targeting change in response to the new definition?**

- There has been no change to current approaches since the LIHC definition was proposed.
- The new definition makes targeting more difficult.
- Schemes are still targeted based on proxy indicators (low income / benefits recipients)
- Targeting is based solely on ECO criteria. Households are targeted if there is funding support available for them (eg, CSCO areas). However, there may not be alignment between LSOAs and CSCO areas.
- Targeting based on funding outside CSCO areas means that delivery organisations are cherry-picking the households that can receive subsidy. Area based approaches are being widely promoted but may no longer work.
- LSOAs disguise rural fuel poverty.
- Many local authorities want to be able to provide a universal offer in their areas, and to use this as a way of investigating further to find those in severe fuel poverty



- Should we target the most needy? Or the most cost effective?
- Should we target the least energy efficient homes?
- Engagement with hard-to-reach groups is not happening

#### **What forms of data sharing would help you target support more effectively?**

- There needs to be better use of data sharing protocols / permissions. For example, Age UK and the Fire Service in one area were able to share data to target older householders: it can be done!
- It feels like there are too many obstacles to effective data sharing.
- Data sharing could be improved internally, with the move of public health into local authorities.
- Information about High Cost is not available - what data could be made available to help us target by usage?
- Consent
- Better data sharing with health (CCG, CSU, doctors)
- Priority Services Register
- Energy usage information from fuel suppliers
- Engagement with local energy champions - sporadic
- Examples of how it has been done

#### **What would be on your wish list for targeting local efforts to tackle fuel poverty?**

- More resources and a more holistic approach across all Council services
- Better resources for behaviour change. Lots of funding is geared at capital works, but behaviour change could play a real part if it was better resourced
- Better resources for monitoring
- A simple tool to help measure fuel poverty / target fuel poor households using the new definition
- An end to the stop / start and short-term nature of funding which has detrimental impacts on delivery. Better planning of when funding streams will be made available.
- Better working with public health and better use of health funding
- Lack of continuity of funding creates an issue for local authorities related to sustainability of service and maintaining staffing levels
- One stop shop
- Engagement with all sectors
- Support for behavioural change and fuel debt
- "Slush fund" to help people off prepayment meters
- Pay as you save model not for the fuel poor. Need fully funded HHCRO.
- Energy education

## **6. About SE<sup>2</sup>**

SE<sup>2</sup> helps individuals, communities and organisations build their capacity to respond to the challenge of climate change. We have worked extensively in the fuel poverty space, helping Government to shape policy and incentives, evaluating funding programmes and delivery models, working with local authorities and public health professionals to design and deliver local schemes and training frontline workers, the voluntary sector and individuals to recognise the signs of fuel poverty, signpost to local schemes and give basic energy advice. In 2013, we created the London Fuel Poverty Hub, a unique online resource signposting to fuel poverty advice and support for residents of all 33 London Boroughs.

You can find out more about us by visiting [www.se-2.co.uk](http://www.se-2.co.uk) or by contacting Liz Warren, Director of SE<sup>2</sup>, on 020 8469 1333 or [liz.warren@se-2.co.uk](mailto:liz.warren@se-2.co.uk).