

Government's Response to the InHouse Policy Consultancy review of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group

Below is the Government's response to the recommendations within the Review of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group carried out on behalf of Defra and DTI by a consultant in the In-House Policy Consultancy. These take account of the response from the Group itself.

Summary of Detailed Recommendations of the review of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group and the Government's response to these

Recommendations are in bold with the Government response in italics below.

- **Continuation of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group**

I recommend that FPAG is continued, but that some changes are made to improve its effectiveness.

We accept this recommendation and address each of the suggested changes below.

- **Make- Up of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group**

That the make-up of the Group continues as at present, but that the Group seeks a new member who is well connected with ODPM's Decent Homes agenda.

That, if the Chair is happy with the recommendations below for changing FPAG's mode of operation, he is invited to stay for a further term.

We support these recommendation and have invited the present member organisations to continue for a further term of three years, with the exception of one organisation who have advised that they are no longer able to participate in the Group. We agree that the Group should look to increase its expertise on Decent Homes related issues through seeking a member who is an expert in this area.

Peter Lehmann has been reappointed as Chair for a further three years.

- **Outputs**

That FPAG spends more time at the beginning of each year working collaboratively with officials not just from Defra and DTI but also ODPM and possible DOH and DWP to identify what opportunities there are to improve fuel poverty policies. The goal of this would be to

encourage a greater fit between advice and policy developments, and enable members to better negotiate the time commitments required.

We support this recommendation and will work with the Group to agree a formal workplan at the start of each financial year.

That work continues on raising awareness with key officials and Ministers and that FPAG continues to ask awkward questions about progress and implementation plans and scrutinising emerging policy, resulting in a report independent of Government.

We agree that the Group should continue to work as described above and should publish an independent report each year.

That work should be reduced on specific policy issues, by focussing on identifying the questions that need to be asked rather than carrying forward the work or agreeing research.

The areas on which the Group should focus should be considered by the Group when developing their workplan taking account of the availability of resources and other activities and priorities. A focus on more strategic work and profile raising would be closely aligned to the remit of the Group.

- **Policy**

Many of the general areas relating to fuel poverty are now answered and therefore work should be more focussed. Possible areas include what if any further work is useful on co-ordinating EEC and Warm Front looking to successors of the current programmes and how the Group can feed into the review of the Home Energy Conservation Act. Also, consideration that the Group be given a specific remit to explore the differential impact of policies on different races, linked to duties under the Race Relations Act.

This will be considered as part of the deliberations by the Group during their workplan discussions. Officials will work with the Group and the Group will be encouraged consider the recommendations of the review. However, the independence of the Group must be retained and therefore it will be for the Group to consider these detailed points.

- **Sponsorship**

That FPAG continues to be sponsored by DTI/Defra but that the Group's Workplan is adopted by the Inter Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty.

We support this recommendation and the Group will continue to be jointly sponsored. The Inter Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty will consider the workplan of the Group once agreed, recognising the need to ensure that this should not compromise the independence of the Group.

- **Getting the work done**

The Group should aim to radically reduce the number of meetings and become more of an umbrella body identifying and steering work rather than taking it forward at an operational level.

We agree with the recommendation to reduce the number of meetings and have considered this with the Group. We now expect the number of meetings to be limited to four per year, with smaller ad-hoc meetings to explore specific areas as required and identified in the work plan. Such ad-hoc meetings would not require the participation of all members but those involved in the workstream.

The Group uses its workplan to identify the skills, independence and resources needed for each task and, where appropriate identifies the resources from existing fuel poverty networks to carry the work forward. Links should be drawn between FPAG and the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes Fuel Poverty Strategy Group.

There are already informal links between FPAG and the EEPfH Fuel Poverty Group with meetings taking place between the Vice Chair of FPAG and chair of the Partnership Group and officials to share knowledge. The format and frequency of these meetings will be reviewed to ensure maximum benefit.

Where there is no existing resource to take work forward, FPAG should identify the costs and relative importance of the work, so that it can feed into Defra and DTI's funding negotiations. The Group should not be allocated a research budget.

We will encourage the Group to work effectively in partnership with other Groups, organisations and relevant Government Departments.

We agree that FPAG should not be allocated a research budget. We will invite FPAG to make recommendations to Government on research to be carried out as part of their workplan activity.

- **Providing the Secretariat**

There are no compelling arguments for changing the arrangements for the Secretariat or for keeping it as it is.

Current Secretariat arrangements will remain, shared between Defra and DTI. In addition the Chair will be provided with independent secretarial support.