



Cynulliad Hinsawdd  
Climate Assembly

## Expert Witness Template

Ben Saltmarsh, Director, NEA Cymru



### What is your passion / specialism / position on solutions to the climate crisis?

- Our homes should be warm and safe, but low incomes, high energy bills and poor energy efficiency deny this to hundreds of thousands of people across Wales.
- The Welsh Government estimates that in 2018, approximately 11% of households in Blaenau Gwent were estimated to be living in fuel poverty, unable to afford to adequately heat their home. (It was estimated 155,000 households – i.e. 12% - were living in fuel poverty across Wales in 2018.)
- These estimates are likely to be significantly higher now following the COVID-19 pandemic, with many people at home more, using more energy and owing more, while earning less.
- Living in a cold, damp home creates unnecessary hardship. It can negatively affect people's health and wellbeing, cause debt, impact on educational attainment, and lead to isolation. It puts additional pressures on the NHS and sadly, around 10,000 people in the UK each year die as a direct result of a cold home.
- National Energy Action (NEA) is a national fuel poverty charity – working across Wales, England and Northern Ireland (together with our sister organisation in Scotland, Energy Action Scotland) – to ensure everyone can afford to keep their homes warm, dry and safe.
- We aim to raise fuel poverty up the agenda and advocate to ensure the needs of those in, or at risk, of fuel poverty are addressed; engaging with Government, industry, local authorities, housing associations and third sector organisations.
- Working in partnership, we also develop technical and community engagement projects supporting low-income and at risk households, provide direct advice and support (via our Warm and Safe Home Advice service), and deliver training and national qualifications to frontline staff covering key issues associated with fuel poverty, fuel debt, affordable warmth and practical energy efficiency advice.



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- The way we need to heat and power our homes is changing. This brings a variety of opportunities and risks and NEA's focus is primarily on ensuring that relevant changes are fair and improve the lives of everyone, including fuel poor households. We do not want to see them left behind or their lives made worse. We believe affordable warm homes should be at the heart of a fair transition to net zero.

## Thinking about critics and/or alternative views to that which you have put forward above – what would others say about your perspective and idea?

- I am not here to speak on the merits of one technology over another. One size does not fit all. Every home and every household is unique and solutions to reducing carbon in the way we heat and power our homes will differ.
- I am here to help focus on the potential impacts to be mindful of on householders currently unable to afford to keep their homes warm.

## Use this final part of your presentation to help Assembly members better understand your position in relation to others and what that means for addressing the question that they have been set.

- This transition will only succeed if people are provided with the right information, advice, protection and support throughout the whole journey.
- To get this right, we believe it means including and prioritising those who need it the most; right from the beginning, to long after work has been completed in the home.
- Energy is essential. For most people, energy use isn't about how many units of energy we use (how many kWhs). It's about keeping warm, having light, cooking food, using appliances. It's about warmth and comfort and convenience and security. It's essential to a good, safe and healthy life.
- We need to reduce the amount of carbon from the way we heat and power our homes. This means the way we heat our homes in the future, and the way we buy and use energy, will be different.
- This, we hope, is a real opportunity to make life better for people. To improve their living standards.
- As we decarbonise our homes, we'd urge we make sure there's a focus on those who are already struggling to heat them. Those who might need support the most. So that we do not leave them behind or make life worse.



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- Whatever options are taken, it's very likely to include improving the energy efficiency of that home. Insulating it. That's also one of the most sustainable, lasting ways of tackling fuel poverty (reducing the amount of energy you need to heat your home in the first place). We need to make sure, then, that the people who need it the most, receive that support the soonest.
- If the technologies we use to heat our home are different, we're going to need to engage people throughout. It's got to work for them. They need to understand how to use it. How they control their heating. Or when or for how long in the day it might be on. This is going to require changes in our habits and it's worth being mindful that this might not always be easy, particularly when things are already difficult, finely balanced, or on a knife edge.
- The way we buy energy in the future might change, too. That brings opportunities. Lots of people are really disengaged with the market currently. It's not working for everyone. And sometimes people pay more for it. It might look different in the future, but the new options are not all regulated yet (or not as tightly). People will need protections and help, e.g. when things go wrong, or they fall into difficulty.
- Ultimately, let's remember what's meaningful to people. Energy use is about warmth and comfort and convenience and security. And everyone should be able to access and afford that.