

Fuel Poverty Action Annual Report

AGM 13 September 2018

Year overview

This has been a very exciting year for FPA. We've been active on all fronts, and in many different ways. We have widened and deepened our connections with other active and effective organisations, have made contact with some that we had not known before, and have helped to establish some new networks.

It's been a year in two halves. The period up to January 2018 was more focused on **poverty and energy prices**, with a lot of effort put into research, clarifying demands around bringing bills down, organising an open letter to Ofgem, and submitting reports and consultation responses to the GLA and others. Since January, with the launch of our campaign for **Safe Cladding and Insulation Now**, we have been intensively involved in the fight for warm, safe, non-combustible, well insulated housing. We have been working with tenants and residents associations and many others in the housing movement, and have expanded our connections with MPs, trade unionists, and grassroots organisations.

Core work has continued throughout. We work with individuals in fuel poverty wanting **advice and support** in dealing with suppliers and landlords, and with organisations of people in fuel poverty or at risk of it, particularly pensioners and people with disabilities. We have increased our **media** presence, with over 30 media appearances in the course of the year, and helped people struggling with energy bills get a chance to speak out in the press, on the radio and on TV.

We also re-launched the second edition of our popular Mini-guide on energy rights.

FPA frequently succeeds in making the expertise and influence of establishment bodies accessible to people who are struggling with cold, high bills and discrimination. We also create opportunities and routes for people at the sharp end of policy decisions to make their voices heard in the corridors of power, whether with politicians, civil servants, or commercial businesses.

And we have added our voice, as a fuel poverty campaign, to the growing insistence that affordable energy must also be sustainable: we cannot afford climate change.

It is FPA's founding principle that fighting for immediate and long-term survival must go hand in hand. We confront at the same time the bill demands of energy companies and bailiffs, the negligence of governments, developers and both private and social landlords in relation to insulation, draughts and heating, and the undemocratic choice of fossil fuels over renewable energy sources, seeing them all as parts of one picture. Similarly, promoting energy efficiency in UK housing must include attention to the plight of people whose insulation which must now be *removed*, post-Grenfell. We have therefore attempted to be

more inclusive than most “fuel poverty” or “environmental” organisations. Even with scant resources, we are proud to have substantially succeeded in this endeavour.

Please see the sections below for more on the different, but overlapping areas of our work confronting the causes and effects of fuel poverty. A more detailed account is available online, as an appendix to this Annual Report.

FPA achievements this year

THE PRICE OF SURVIVAL

People facing fuel poverty this year have been caught in a double pincer: rising energy prices, and the extremes of cold – and heat – which have been a predicted feature of climate change.

This year, as always, FPA has **advised and supported numerous individuals** in their battles with energy companies and debt, and worked with tenants whose boilers or heating systems were inefficient, unreliable or costly. With pensioners’ groups we spoke at meetings, and ran a stall at Lambeth Country Fair. We re-launched the second edition of our popular handbook: **“In Trouble**

“I told my landlord I’m meeting a group called Fuel Poverty Action. He said what do they do? I said, “tell us our rights”. He saw my eyes open. At 5 a.m. he turned up with a new boiler. . . . Now I will tell E.ON I’ve been to FPA.”

Liz, tenant in a privately rented flat, North London

with your energy company? A Mini-Guide to your Rights”, updated and expanded with sections on landlords and District Heating.

At the same time we spoke out **through the media** about the devastation caused by high prices, and, critically, helped make way for people in fuel poverty to have a public voice, especially during the extreme cold of last winter and early spring. Highlights included two appearances on the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire show, one in October alongside Labour and Conservative spokespeople on energy, and one in March with two mothers who spoke strongly about how the “Beast from the East” was experienced by families in fuel poverty.

Tariffs and caps

In their 2017 election manifesto, the Conservative Party promised a cap on prices, but they failed to include this in the following Queen’s Speech. Ofgem’s proposals for a fall-back “safeguarding cap” “to protect the most vulnerable” left out many of the people who needed it most. Working with Disabled People Against Cuts, **FPA campaigned for a universal cap** on energy prices, and, failing that, for the “safeguarding tariff” to be extended beyond those who succeeded in being awarded the Warm Home Discount. Our **Open Letter to Ofgem** about their discriminatory proposals was signed by nearly 40 organisations including two national trade unions, and was delivered with a demonstration, on 21 November.

Huge price rises, over 8% in 2017, have continued this year, with the biggest supplier, British Gas, raising prices 5.5% in April and again by 3.8% in August. Lower prices offered by the smaller, “challenger” companies have also been going up.

“Fuel Poverty Action do a public service by highlighting the inability of many households to keep food fresh in a fridge or a freezer, to cook it or to keep warm in the winter”

Rev. Paul Nicolson, founder,
Taxpayers Against Poverty

The “safeguarding tariff” came in on 2 Feb, for people with Warm Home Discount only.

And a cap on standard tariffs has now finally been agreed. Unless there is a legal challenge by the Big Six, it should be in place by this December. Unfortunately, it is higher than originally suggested, due to the rising wholesale prices of fossil fuels.

In an area of work new to us, we highlighted the dilemmas faced by people in **off-grid, rural homes** where old stone cottages can be impossible to insulate and astronomically

expensive to heat. There is generally no alternative to oil heaters, and we successfully pressed BEIS to allow ECO funding for repair and replacement of these heaters.

DISTRICT HEATING

District Heating, or Heat Networks, now account for only a very small proportion of the country’s heat, but with a **£320 million injection from public funds** anticipated later this year, District Heating is expected to expand to meet up to 17% of heat demand in homes by 2050.

Such communal systems have the **potential to bring down bills and carbon emissions** - and in some places they do. In others, they have proved disastrous, with sky high prices, constant break-downs, cold hot water, overheating, and terrible customer services. Residents on heat networks are caught in a monopoly and cannot switch.

Over the past two years FPA has worked to build up a network where users can exchange experience and tactics, and support each other to speak out. We have been reliably informed that this work, and our case studies documenting the reality of living with poor systems, have substantially affected how

heat networks are being brought in now. We are continuing to apply to funding foundations to get further support for our work in this area.

“The work of Fuel Poverty Action has relentlessly kept attention focused on consumer benefit – or lack of it. This undoubtedly played a key role in recent policy developments leading to the CMA’s recommendation for the regulation of the heat network market.”

Michael King - Co-convenor, UK District Energy
Vanguards Network

This year we have **supported residents** of four London estates with problematic district heating systems in pressing their case with their landlords and suppliers, with the trade body the ADE, with the GLA (Greater London Authority) RE:NEW scheme, and directly with the

Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, BEIS. We helped to win relief on one estate from unjust back bills worth hundreds, and probably thousands, of pounds. And we brought expert and reliable advice to another estate where District Heating is now being planned; the outlook looks positive!

“We’re about to embark on a huge expansion [of District Heating in the UK] and clearly we can’t do that if there are existing problems which need sorting out.”

Guy Boulby, Head of Heat Networks Policy at BEIS, in a meeting with FPA and residents of two housing estates

We have continued to have an impact on a policy level as well. **FPA were consulted by BEIS, and by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)**, submitting evidence in writing, in a lively meeting with residents at BEIS’ office, and in a phone conference with the CMA. **In a major breakthrough, the CMA has finally recommended regulation of the industry.**

We also **submitted to the Greater London Authority** detailed critiques of existing systems and recommendations for change, in three consultation exercises.

Meanwhile, we regularly **brought residents’ voices and concerns to heat network industry events** at every level, in person, and to government, politicians and others via press releases and the media. We have informed housing organisations and networks about District Heating, and confronted and critiqued the industry’s trade body, ADE, and the self-serving proposals they produced via their Task Force.

Leaseholders with District Heating may face not only high standing charges, but sudden demands for tens of thousands of pounds for new capital expenditure on replacements, improvement, or extension of their systems. As “homeowners”, they are sometimes assumed to be immune from fuel poverty, but we have found many cannot even afford to heat their homes, let alone find such huge capital sums. We have stood up for them with the industry, with BEIS and the CMA, in House of Commons meetings, and on the media, and have worked to help them make their case. A small pool of individuals cannot be expected to pay from their pockets for an infrastructure development in UK heating.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The UK’s housing stock is some of the draughtiest and least well insulated in Europe, and progress has virtually stalled since 2012 with huge government cuts to energy efficiency programmes. This contributes massively to high heating bills, and to carbon emissions.

This year has seen an intensification of our efforts to ensure residents have adequate - and safe - insulation and draught-free homes, working with many other organisations who are prioritising this issue.

We are an active member of the **End Fuel Poverty Coalition (EFPC)**, which largely focuses on policy issues related to energy efficiency. In discussion with other members of the Coalition, and particularly with 10:10 climate charity, we responded to government **consultation on MEES - the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard** regulations for the private rented sector, and helped to promote the campaign on this issue led by 10:10. New regulations on MEES are expected in autumn 2018, to come into force 1 April 2019.

Energy efficiency figured heavily in our detailed responses to two **GLA consultations** and the draft London Plan.

While many organisations focus purely on “policy”, we have **supported residents associations, and sometimes individual tenants, fighting for insulation and draught-proofing** in their own homes. What’s important is reality on the ground, and no policies, laws or standards are worth much if they are not enforced. Pembroke Park Residents Association in Hillingdon, for example, have been in a prolonged battle to get their new-build, modern, homes insulated. Their Housing Association A2D admit that they are “heating the street” but blame the developers Taylor Wimpey. We tried to get help from the GLA’s “RE:NEW” scheme but A2D refused it and said the developers should pay. So far, the buck-passing continues while residents freeze. This is one battle we will be taking forward into the new year.

In the meantime we have focused on insulation in one major area: the homes that were clad and insulated in combustible materials.

***“Pembroke Park Estate has been working constructively with FPA for some years to resolve the plight of our residents who lack proper insulation. FPA are one of the few organisations who really want to tackle the issue and get justice.*”**

Suzy Killip, Chair, Pembroke Park Residents Association

SAFE CLADDING AND INSULATION NOW

The Grenfell fire was a wake-up call, putting it beyond dispute that in UK housing, regulations and enforcement are sorely lacking, and residents’ voices are ignored. In the agony of their own crisis, Grenfell survivors still made it a priority to press for other residential buildings to be made fire-safe, and the government promised to “do whatever it takes” to “keep our people safe”.

This, however, has not happened. **Four hundred and sixty six high rise residential buildings**, both social housing and private, have so far been identified as having been clad in combustible materials. As of August 2018, only 23 had had this replaced.

Moreover, when the cladding and insulation comes off, residents can be left for months or years **exposed to the elements**. FPA became involved because of this widely unnoticed predicament: people were freezing. But we then met residents whose cladding was still ON - and made the decision that we could not, in our demand for urgent action, separate the two. There are residents with, and without, cladding living on different floors of the same blocks.

The crisis affects both **social housing tenants and** private residents including **leaseholders** on privately owned blocks.

We contacted and supported residents on several affected estates, produced a video of first hand testimonies, and in January held a public meeting, *Dying from Fire, Dying from Cold*, with a speaker from Grenfell, an MP, a councillor and an architect.

“Fuel Poverty Action help me by giving me the confidence to stand up against injustice and to fight for what’s right, which is the human rights of all residents in our block of flats.”

Elizabeth Okpo, tenant in a Salford tower block with Grenfell-style cladding

Our aim was first to support residents directly affected, and secondarily to establish the right to insulation everywhere, and to **help drive up standards and expectations** more widely. This depends on residents’ organisations gaining access to information and connections that they are too often denied. We know from our own experience, and from our work on District Heating, that it can also be crucial to hear what’s going on elsewhere. The response of landlords and local authorities varies greatly. Camden are covering the cost of extra high heating bills in de-clad buildings (still not enough, as tenants remain cold). Barnet offered £15 a week (originally to be paid towards resident’s rent arrears!). Some tenants have received nothing.

Building a network and information exchange is one priority for 2018-19. Another is increasing **pressure on a public policy level**. FPA initiated the **SCIN campaign, for Safe Cladding and Insulation Now**. Central to this has been an Open Letter to the Secretary of State demanding government funding for re-cladding, and protection of residents from fire and from cold until that is completed.

The letter was revised when **the government finally agreed to fund the re-cladding of social housing blocks**. They had been under pressure not only from our campaign but from local authorities, and - crucially - from Grenfell survivors who were determined that no other block should suffer what had happened to them.

Eleven months on from the fire and the promises, **this was a huge achievement, which, however, left many still in danger**. It did nothing for leaseholders, or for the thousands of student residences, hospitals, and schools across the country. It did not fund other crucial aspects of fire safety, or buildings under 18 metres high. And there was no schedule for refurbishment, despite the facts that lives were - and are - at stake. Our Open Letter, with over 60 signatories so far, has support from a wide range of organisations and MPs. **FPA has been getting the word out** to many who didn’t know there was a problem. While the struggle of leaseholders became well known, many people think social housing tenants are okay - we have even heard this in Parliament. We used the media - who have been slow to pick up on the problem of cold, in particular, and got coverage on radio and TV, a very prominent letter in the Guardian in January, and crucially, two substantial blogs on the widely read site of Grenfell Action Group.

On the ground FPA were attending and speaking at grassroots meetings of the housing movement, pensioners’ groups, and others. In a very different circle, the key ‘built environment’ experts, the BRE (British Research Establishment), perhaps in pursuit of their aim to “escape the usual echo chamber”, invited us in June to take part in a breakfast roundtable with senior policy-makers, building experts, and academics. Very aware of the

BRE's controversial role since Grenfell, we brought residents' concerns, experience, and questions, particularly about combustible materials.

On a Parliamentary level we have written to hundreds of MPs, spoken to many, and met some. We raised the leaseholders' predicament in the House of Commons in a meeting about the other crises facing the UK's leaseholders, and followed this up with a response to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry into the Government's ongoing leasehold reform programme. We have drafted model motions for political parties, and also for trade unions.

Since June we have been working closely with residents of a tower block in Salford, Spruce Court, whose cladding has not yet been removed and who were not being listened to by their Housing Association or Council.

FPA publicised their situation through our website and helped to get media coverage for their spokeswoman, Elizabeth Okpo. They asked to meet people from Grenfell, and we organised a meeting with Grenfell United, also including people from a number of London estates. As a result of that meeting two members of Grenfell United also went up to Salford and helped residents get a new action group off the ground. FPA researched

"Your comparison document certainly helped in my outlining of the severity of the situation and I explained that Fuel Poverty Action was a leading national organisation who were now closely following actions in Salford. The Deputy Mayor suggested that he and Pendleton Together could arrange an urgent meeting with Fuel Poverty Action to discuss this and other suggestions/concerns you have regarding fuel poverty and the nibe heating system."

Rebecca Long-Bailey, MP for Salford & Eccles and Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

and documented the frightening similarities between Spruce Court and Grenfell. We invited Spruce Court residents to a meeting we had scheduled with the Shadow Business and Energy minister, Rebecca Long-Bailey, who happens to be their MP, and she used our "mirror" document comparing their tower block to Grenfell in a meeting with Salford's Deputy Mayor. We also helped to make this comparison public through a major article in the Guardian and through Grenfell Action Group's blog. We hope to see progress.

"If we don't get change through this, we never will."

Ishmael Francis-Murray, who grew up in and near Grenfell Tower, and, after the fire, produced the film, "Failed by the State", speaking at our January meeting "Dying from Fire, Dying from Cold"



FOSSIL FREE ENERGY UNDER DEMOCRATIC CONTROL

It is increasingly clear that fossil fuels are unaffordable.

FPA has long been committed to the fight against **fracking**, which will not bring down fuel bills but will cause environmental devastation, and high financial costs both to local people and to all who suffer the effects of a changing climate. In February we supported a small but well-publicised “cat-walk” demonstration with Vivienne Westwood during British Fashion Week, outside the headquarters of Ineos - a company heavily invested in fracking. In August we joined a local demonstration against fracking at a site in Horse Hill, Surrey, and in September supported and spoke at the “100 Women at Parliament Square” event organised by the “Nanas” who have led the strong resistance to fracking in Lancashire.

In March we circulated the fantastic short film made by Coal Action Network on the local and climate effects of **coal**. FPA, and the implications for fuel poverty, were featured throughout.

In August we promoted a call from Biofuelwatch and voiced our objections to the Drax power station’s plans to create, at their site in Yorkshire, the UK’s largest **gas-fired power** plant to date. Our response to the Planning Inspectorate’s consultation pointed out how this year’s extreme temperatures are now making summer another dangerous season, with summer heat waves as lethal as winter cold.

The push for **renewable alternatives** is equally important. As well as taking part in London-based fossil free and “divest” initiatives, and debates about decarbonising heating, we were invited to Brussels to take part in strategy meeting of the Right to Energy coalition, a coalition of unions, green NGOs, housing providers, health and anti-poverty organisations and community energy cooperatives, aiming to eliminate energy poverty in Europe, with a major focus on renewable energy.

The best chance for renewable energy, and important in its own right, is the movement towards energy **democratically controlled** by local communities. We have long supported - and helped to start - Switched On London (SOL), which is fighting for a municipal energy company that would be clean, green, fairly priced and under democratic control. In November 2017 FPA took part in the dramatic protest at City Hall that SOL organised with Divest London, bringing Mayor’s Question Time to a halt and demanding an end to broken climate promises. In July we were asked by a Swansea council officer to support a move towards a non-profit energy company there. Our positive response was prominently publicised by the council.



At a demonstration against fracking in Horse Hill, Surrey, 20 August 2018

Our core team

Without paid staff, there is inevitably a lot of coming and going among the people who carry forward the work of FPA. Over the past year our London-based team has included the following people long-term, along with many others who have been involved in the work for shorter periods:

Ruth London, is a founder member of FPA, formed in 2011. She is 68, and a grandmother. Active for five decades in organising against poverty, discrimination and climate change, and against rape. Social housing tenant. (Director)

Diane Skidmore, joined FPA 2012. She is 68, mother of six, grandmother, activist, council tenant for 30 years; home-educated last four children so also educated many others on her estate. A retired NHS health trainer, she still works to support healthy living and well-being. (Director)

Frances Sleep has been involved with FPA since 2012. She teaches Philosophy and Theology to sixth form students, and can sometimes bring her concerns with peace building and climate change to work. She is very concerned about fracking and likes to support local campaigns. Private renting tenant.

Alasdair Mussell, joined FPA 2013. He is 32, a Primary School Teacher, working on private tenants rights (also with the London Renters Union). Believes in safe, secure, warm, genuinely affordable housing for all! Private rented tenant. (Director, retiring Sept 2018).

Dan Goss, joined FPA in early 2015. He is 25, and has been involved with movements for climate justice and more, and with Plan C. At his job he is a rank and file trade unionist campaigning for the living wage. Likes sci-fi, dancing, and rock climbing. Private rented tenant (Director, retiring Sept 2018)

David Rosenfeld, joined in 2016. Dave worked in environmental and safety research and enforcement for 35 years and campaigned on politics of energy and workplace hazards. He joined the Greens in 2014 for a fairer world safe from environmental and social destruction.

Philip McMahon joined FPA in 2017. He's a web developer at The Guardian newspaper. Outside of FPA, he's been active with Campaign Against Arms Trade for several years. He thinks retrofitting the UK's housing stock is an easy obvious win against climate change. Private rented tenant.

Satya Savitzky, a researcher with interest in energy and ecology, has been a regular volunteer 2017-18 while searching for work. He is now taking up a post at Dundee University.

Sam Hayward joined FPA in 2017. He is 25, has been involved in Divest Lambeth and deforestation campaigns, is employed as a research analyst, believes in "collective liberation (essential to this is anti-speciesism) and anti-capitalist political economies". Private rented tenant.

Help and support, and strengthened collaboration

We greatly appreciate the very substantial contributions of experts in the fields of energy, heating, housing, and poverty, including

- Syed Ahmed of Energy for London
- William Baker and Jake Beavan at Citizens Advice
- Dr Brenda Boardman, Emeritus Fellow: Energy at Oxford University, and authority on fuel poverty
- Lucy Grove, Grenfell Programme Lead at National Housing Federation
- Dr Stuart Hodkinson, University of Leeds
- Becka Hudson, Radical Housing Network
- Dr Charlotte Johnson, UCL
- Michael King, Co-convenor, UK District Energy Vanguards Network
- Phil Murphy, ex fire-fighter and Fire Safety Officer
- Professor Anne Power, LSE
- Peter Smith at NEA (National Energy Action)

Syed Ahmed in particular has been a consistent adviser; we are very grateful for his generosity with his time and expertise. We want to thank **Stuart Hodkinson** for a substantial financial donation. We have also had help and advice from industry experts in enterprise software for operating heat networks.

We are active and contributing members of the following networks and coalitions:

- End Fuel Poverty Coalition
- Radical Housing Network
- Right to Energy Coalition

We have built on and deepened our connections with a number of other organisations with which we have long and in many cases active working relationships:

- 10:10 Climate Action
- All African Women's Group
- Biofuelwatch
- Broadwater Farm Residents Association
- Campaign Against Climate Change
- Coal Action Network
- Coppermill Heights Residents Association (Hale Village, Tottenham)
- Disabled People Against Cuts
- Lambeth Pensioners Action Group
- London Tenants Federation
- Myatts Field North Residents Association and Monitoring Board (MFN-RAMB)
- National Pensioners Convention (NPC)
- Pembroke Park Residents Association
- PCS Union
- Reclaim the Power
- Repowering London
- Southwark Pensioners Action Group
- Switched On London
- TAROE Trust
- Taxpayers Against Poverty
- Unison.

We also made new connections with:

- Axe the Housing Act
- British Research Establishment
- Citiscape Residents Association
- Chalcots Estate Tenants and Residents Association (Taplow)
- Community Energy London
- Concrete Action
- Granville Estate Residents Association
- Shelter
- Spruce Court Action Group (newly formed)
- Tenants Union UK

Of particular importance in our campaign for safe cladding and insulation is our connection with:

- Grenfell United, and with
- Grenfell Action Group

We've had generous practical help from film-maker Simon King and layout artist Peter Target. We also appreciate our supportive meeting venues: Crossroads Women's Centre in Kentish Town, Art4Space in Stockwell, and the Common House in Bethnal Green.

“It's been a real privilege to work with Fuel Poverty Action over the past year. FPA go to the heart of the issue of fuel poverty, based on the direct experience of the people: those who are struggling with their energy bills, who are poorly served by their energy providers, or, like the residents of Grenfell, have had their concerns completely ignored. FPA provide a platform for these voices to be heard at the highest levels of power and – most importantly – FPA have no fear.”

Syed Ahmed, Director, Energy for London

Publications and consultations

Over the year we have submitted detailed responses to the following public consultations (all available on our website).

- Ofgem's statutory consultation for a vulnerable customer safeguard, November 2017
- The Mayor's draft London Environment Strategy, November 2017
- The Mayor's draft Fuel Poverty Action Plan for London, November 2017
- Consultation draft of the Mayor's New London Plan, March 2018
- The Competition and Market Authority (CMA) Heat Networks Market Study: Statement of Scope response January 2018, phone consultation February 2018
- Housing for the many, Labour's review of social housing, January 2018
- BEIS consultation: Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in Private Sector housing, March 2018
- BEIS consultation: Response to new Energy Company Obligation proposals, July 2018.

- Planning inspectorate consultation: Burning gas at Drax Power Station: a development we cannot afford, August 2018
- Evidence to Housing, Communities and Local Government Leasehold Reform Inquiry, September 2018

We re-launched the second edition of our popular handbook: ***“In Trouble with your energy company? A Mini-Guide to your Rights”***

We published on our website a **Briefing on cladding** including a history of regulation, and information about pressure from the plastics industry.

We drafted the **Open letter to Ofgem re a safeguarding tariff**, signed by 37 organisations.

FPA were involved in two short films:

- We produced a video of personal testimony from residents with Grenfell-style cladding, or living in the cold where it has been removed.
- We were interviewed and featured strongly in the Coal Action Network film “A Just End to Coal Now”.

Still no staff! – but we have some resources

We have not been successful as yet in securing core funding to employ a salaried worker, but it has not been for want of trying! Despite this, we have been able to accomplish a great deal, as set out in this report - arguably as much as many organisations with regular paid staff. FPA members have again contributed a great deal of voluntary time, and have also covered their own and our organisational expenses. We have also benefited from the spring 2017 donations organised by Vivienne Westwood (see last year’s annual report).

We have succeeded accessing some funding for the SCIN campaign for Safe Cladding and Insulation Now! **We are grateful to Lush for a grant of £3,600**, and to several generous private individuals. We have also had a few affiliations and donations from Trade Union branches. The total is not nearly enough for what we need, and we have other applications pending, both for SCIN and for our core expenses.

As of our last AGM, we were looking for a way to pay for work, which did not commit us to a regular salary that we might be unable to sustain, while we continued to seek secure funding. Following that AGM, we instituted a new system of weekly, paid, collective work sessions for committed volunteers. This has been much more productive - and enjoyable - than working alone, and has enabled a lot of skill-sharing; those taking part have trained each other and we have all developed. However, it’s understandable that there has been a lot of turnover as people find full-time jobs and move on.

We still urgently need core funding but are not disheartened by our modest success in this area to date. We will be redoubling efforts over the coming year to help fund new work. As energy bills continue to rise, and both climate change and austerity bite even harder, this is needed more than ever.