

Dear Sophie

Please see below our response :

Response to Energy Redress Scheme.

Our response is that a Fuel Voucher Fund is a good way of providing immediate relief, however there were difficulties when only those with prepayment meters were able to access the facility. Those consumer's who paid for their heating via other ways were excluded. It was felt that all consumers should have a way of accessing immediate relief in specific crises. The 'technology' sometimes failed in that vouchers were unable to be redeemed.

It was also noted that although this does provide immediate relief, for some beneficiaries there would be other longer term issues that would not be addressed just by one voucher and this lead to multiple applications and concern that when the project ended the consumer would still require assistance in this and possible other capacities.

The scheme should take into account all consumers and have processes for allowing those who pay for their energy via other methods to be included. Other longer term measures such as broadening of the Warm Home Discount criteria may help or multiple access to funds.

The introduction of a 'independent third party' to assess eligibility would help the charity sector, we at times felt 'overwhelmed' making the decisions of who qualifies to get help. A staff training programme was another suggestion that may help.

The application and eligibility process was straightforward and easy to understand, however the lowest amount we could bid for was £20k, which was a high amount. Perhaps a lower threshold or thresholds according to size of charity may be another way forward. Some help with how to calculate the number of vouchers that may be required, IE a formula.

The non-advertising of the scheme and the fact that we were unable to let our trusted partners, and other organisations know that we could access and supply vouchers was surprising. We understand that fraud and scheme abuse were the influencers around this decision however we felt that this decision did stop us from utilising the funds we had been authorised to distribute and was the main factor around the large amount of funds we returned. Perhaps a standard social media post or some preapproved advertising could help in this respect

We are also concerned that like a lot of other schemes, it closed on 31st March 2021, we expect to continue to see consumers with immediate energy needs that we are now unable to assist.

Thank you for taking the time to read our response, if you have any questions or wish to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact me.