

Notes of 28th Meeting of the Supervisory Panel
Renewable Energy Consumer Code
26th June 2013

Present:

David Laird (Chair)

Bryn Aldridge – former Director of Trading Standards and Veterinary Services for The City of London

Jim Thornycroft – independent solar PV expert

Walter Carlton – Deloitte LLP

Philip Wolfe – independent renewable technology expert

Dave Sowden – Micropower Council

Mike Landy – REA

Anna Moule – Ofgem (observer)

In attendance:

Virginia Graham – RECC

Andrea Kourra – RECC (minutes)

Rebecca Robbins – RECC (part)

Mark Cutler – RECC (part)

Apologies:

Steve Storey – SSE

Gretel Jones – Independent social issues expert

Heather Kerr – Gemserv (MCS Licensee)

Martin Cotterell – Sundog Energy Ltd

Paul Rochester – DECC (observer)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the 28th meeting of the Supervisory Panel. Introductions were made and apologies for absence were noted.

The Chair congratulated Bryn Aldridge who had received an MBE as part of the Queen's birthday honours.

2. Minutes of 27th Supervisory Panel Meeting

The Minutes of the 27th Supervisory Panel Meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

The Panel agreed that the Summary of Actions circulated after the last meeting was helpful and that a Summary of Actions should be circulated immediately after each meeting.

The matters arising from the Summary of Actions were discussed. It was noted that the first two actions had not been addressed.

It was confirmed that the guidance on performance estimates for heat pumps and model quote would be provided to the next meeting of the Panel. The guidance for performance estimates for solar PV and model quote was ready and would be posted on the RECC website shortly.

It was reported that in the last quarter all applications selected for spot-check had been selected on a risk basis so no comparison had been produced to show the difference between spot checks selected on a random and a risk basis.

It was confirmed that the other actions had all been completed and, where relevant, would be picked up at relevant places in the agenda.

4. Highlight Report

The Panel discussed the first version of the three-monthly Highlight Report which gives an overview of RECC's work during the period. The Panel agreed that it was a helpful and informative report which should continue to be produced in advance of each meeting.

Membership:

It was noted that there had been a loss of 994 members in the period between the end of March and mid-June, representing the number of businesses who had not renewed their RECC membership for 2013. It was explained that the net loss of membership was considerably lower since new businesses have continued to join throughout the year.

Monitoring:

It was explained that RECC was currently reviewing its monitoring strategy to be sure that it complies with TSI's core criteria which are slightly different from OFT's core criteria. TSI requires all members to be audited at least once every five years. RECC is considering introducing paper-based monitoring alongside audit visits. The final monitoring strategy will be made available to the Panel at the December meeting.

It was noted that RECC always welcomes potential mystery shoppers and suggestions for increasing the response rate from the consumer satisfaction surveys.

Complaints:

The monthly complaints figures were considered. It was explained that the number of complaints being received remained high, on average 100 per month, with the lowest monthly total for the year to date in April at 80.

It was noted that solar PV complaints as a proportion of installations had remained constant in 2011 and 2012 at 0.5%.

There was a discussion about the different complaints routes for Green Deal, RHI, FiTs etc. It was explained that Green Deal Oversight & Registration Body and DECC would be providing consumer routing and the intention was that there would be equivalent avenues of redress available. The Chair suggested that the Panel revisit the issue once the information had been made available and systems were up and running.

It was noted that 16 complaints had been referred to conciliation to date in 2013 compared with a total of 20 in 2012. Those complaints that had been settled were settled either partly or wholly in favour of the consumer. 7 complaints had been referred to arbitration to date in 2013 compared with a total of 4 in 2012. All the consumers' claims had succeeded in whole or part with the member in question having been shown to have failed in its duty of care to the consumer. Any member that does not comply with an arbitration award will be referred to the Non-Compliance Panel since this is a very serious breach of the Code.

It was explained that there was still a backlog of around 8 weeks between a complaint being notified and a case handler being appointed to take the case forward. Efforts were being made to streamline the complaints handling process and to ensure that complaints were referred to conciliation and arbitration sooner. The Panel suggested that the initial notification letter to the member after a complaint had been notified could be strengthened with a view to increasing the number of complaints resolved before a case handler needed to become involved, currently 1 in 10.

It was confirmed that there would be an update on complaints at each Supervisory Panel meeting. Further it was confirmed that MCS would provide an overview of complaints registered with CBs and the MCS Licensee at the next meeting as requested.

Non-Compliance and Applications Panels:

The Chair confirmed that he had been talking to Mary Symes, Chair of the Non-Compliance Panel, and Keith Richards, Chair of the Applications Panel, to understand the type of issues arising from their work and any subsequent implications for the Code and the Bye-laws. It was confirmed that the Executive is keeping an issues log listing any planned changes to the Code and Bye-Laws.

Regulation:

The Panel noted the updates provided on the Renewable Heat Premium Payments and Renewable Heat Incentive. They asked to be kept updated about DECC's publication of the domestic Renewable Heat Incentive decisions.

Other issues:

The Panel noted the information provided about the imposition of EU Anti-Dumping duties on solar PV products from China. Initially the duties would be 11.8% and then from 8 August 2013 the duties would rise to between 37% and 98%, depending on the manufacturer. It was noted that the imposition of the duties was creating uncertainty in the solar PV sector. It was further noted that the UK Government had remained steadfast in opposing the imposition of duties.

5. RECC Online Training Resource

The Secretariat demonstrated for Panel Members the updated online training resource accessible by logging in to the Members' Area. The training explains the Code requirements and the relevant consumer protection regulations, gives actual examples from the sector and includes links to other useful resources. The training aims to get across to members what the Code and legislative requirements mean in practice and to bring them to life. The Panel noted that, in the next phase, an interactive Q and A facility would be introduced, so that members and their staff will be able to test their understanding of the information and to submit their results to RECC if they wish.

Finally the Secretariat explained the new arbitration service for 'micro-business consumers' and how it works. The Panel agreed that this was a useful introduction for consumers who were not domestic but were still very small, including farmers, hotel and B&B owners and small craftsmen.

6. Update on Transfer of CCAS to TSI and Official Launch

The Secretariat explained that the official launch of the TSI's Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS) had taken place the previous week. Photographs were circulated of RECC receiving their TSI Certificate of Approval. RECC had attended the launch at the TSI Conference in Brighton having gained approval under the CCAS in April. Other bodies are now free to apply to TSI to have their codes approved under the CCAS. The Secretariat confirmed that RECC had had a small stand at the TSI Conference and that it intended to take a stand at the 2014 Conference in Harrogate.

7. Draft RECC Communications strategy

Panel Members discussed the draft RECC Communications Strategy and provided feedback and suggestions. It was noted that the final version would be circulated at the next Meeting with an Implementation Plan.

The Secretariat explained that it would be introducing a newsletter to members. The first issue would be published at the end of June and the second at the end of September. Panel Members

advised that it would be important to be sure of the target audience for the newsletter. Panel Members noted that promotion of the Code and promotion of the sector are two different things. Panel Members also noted that the timing and context of communications within which external communication take place. Raising RECC's profile among its members was viewed as important. Panel Members also suggested that REAL might consider creating and building up a portfolio of factsheets, depending on available resources. Panel Members suggested that RECC might also compile a media pack.

On the issue of resources it was noted that REA's Communications Manager assists RECC with its communications work, but that RECC does not have a dedicated Communications Manager. The Secretariat explained that, if RECC has sufficient resource in future, it will engage with social media and online fora with a view to transmitting consumer protection messages and stories, and thereby raising the profile of the Code.

Finally, Panel Members noted the rebranding of RECC so as to differentiate more effectively the activities of REAL from the activities of RECC. Panel Members saw the RECC website was noted. VG showed the Panel REAL's website, which is now separate from RECC's website. Panel Members agreed that the rebranding was effective and that the website had been updated to show the new logo consistently.

8. A.O.B.

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

9. Date of Future 2013 Panel Meetings

It was noted that the remaining two Supervisory Panel Meetings for 2013 would take place on 18th September and 11th December.