# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Cavity Wall Insulation in Wales – Welsh Government Update** |
| **DATE**  | **13 June 2017** |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths AM, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs** |

This Written Statement is in response to concerns about problems some households have encountered following the installation of retrofit cavity wall insulation. Cavity wall insulation failure can cause serious hardship to vulnerable households who believed it would help keep their homes warmer and fuel bills lower.

Cavity wall insulation is a cost effective way of reducing fuel bills where it has been installed correctly. This means prior to installation properly assessing important factors such as construction and condition of external walls, their exposure to wind driven rain and, post installation, ensuring appropriate maintenance and householder information is available.

In recent years, questions have been asked about the quality and skills employed in assessing the suitability of a property.

The bulk of cavity wall insulation has been carried out under UK Government or energy company schemes such as ECO and its predecessors. These schemes have often been targeted at the most vulnerable in society, who may be less able to deal with problems if an installation goes wrong. The desire to keep costs down and the way potential work or ‘leads’ are incentivised are suggested as having led to installations in unsuitable properties and also workmanship problems. The Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency, CIGA, has issued just over 300,000 guarantees in Wales. Their data indicates there have been just over 2,000 claims.

The Building Research Establishment Wales Report into Post Installation Performance of Cavity and External Wall Insulation in Wales, identified instances where the insulation was installed in unsuitable properties or contrary to good practice. The report, and our subsequent investigations, has identified three main areas of concern:

* the quality of pre-installation assessments, the evidence suggests some unsuitable properties have been fitted with insulation;
* lack of information given to householders, particularly regarding the importance of maintenance of walls and proper ventilation;
* and finally the process for redress when things do wrong.

Cavity wall insulation is notifiable work under the Building Regulations, most retrofit insulation is undertaken and self certified through what are known as ‘Competent Person’ schemes, which must comply with Conditions of Authorisation. These schemes were inherited when the building regulations functions were transferred at the end of 2011 and are intended to ensure, scheme members can demonstrate competence to perform specified areas of work.

One of the recommendations of the BRE Wales report was for an assessment of the schemes for cavity wall insulation, in particular, the requirements for surveying and assessing property suitability. My officials have discussed the report with scheme operators registered to undertake cavity wall insulation work including the British Board of Agrément, responsible for certifying products and installation processes and CIGA. CIGA have recognised the problems facing customers and are taking action in a number of areas:

* Introduction of a requirement for an independent and properly qualified surveillance assessment for proposed installations;
* Establishment of a consumer champion and improved complaint handling system;
* Development of a Property Care pack for householders, advising on care and maintenance to prevent moisture affecting the insulation.

In parallel with our activities, in England, the ‘Each Home Counts’ report has considered consumer advice, protection, standards and enforcement for a range of home energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. The report recognises many of the issues highlighted in the BRE Wales report.

It proposes a new Quality Mark to deal with standards, quality assurance and customer care, applicable to programmes such as ECO 3 which is planned for introduction in 2018. I wrote to the UK Government Minister responsible for the implementation of the recommendations following the report to highlight my three main areas of concern, and we are now engaged with the relevant UK departments and are assessing what action we may need to take in Wales.

Cavity Wall Insulation may be included as part of a package of measures installed under our Welsh Government Warm Homes Nest and Arbed schemes. Our approach to determining which energy efficiency measures are recommended for a particular property ensures only the most appropriate and cost-effective measures are installed. We are currently piloting a new process under Arbed, which requires Local Authorities to procure independent whole house surveys of properties before potential schemes are evaluated and awarded funding. This should further strengthen the decision making process.