

# **Green Deal Panel for Hard to Reach Audiences Report**

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# Executive summary

The Green Deal Panel for Hard to Reach Households was formed to provide Government with recommendations on the most effective communication and engagement routes to communicate to hard to reach households the benefits of installing energy saving Green Deal measures, supported by the new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) where appropriate.

The Panel, chaired by Laura Sandys MP, met on three occasions and heard views from a range of government, industry, trade association and other sources. This report summarises these views and makes subsequent recommendations for DECC and other government departments to consider.

Overall, panel members found a strong consensus across all contributors on the best approaches and consequently emphasise the importance of using existing trusted channels of communication to reach and influence these households.

These channels include local authorities, charities, community groups, advisors such as Citizens Advice, and friends/ family. There are also potential opportunities to communicate through other government departments' programmes.

Clear, simple communication using digital and traditional approaches is essential.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Local Authorities**

DECC need to recognise the key role that local authorities will play in identifying and communicating with hard to reach households.

DECC should work with closely with Local Authorities and the LGA to encourage:

- the energy suppliers and other organisations active on the Green Deal to work with local authorities and community groups to help identify eligible groups and to raise awareness of the Green Deal and ECO.

- local Health and Wellbeing boards to consider the role the Green Deal and ECO can play within their overall Health and Wellbeing strategies in helping those most in need stay warm.

### **Working with other Government departments**

DECC should continue to explore ways in which they can work with other government departments to communicate the benefits of improving the energy efficiency of properties and how the Green Deal and ECO can help.

In particular:

- DECC must work with Department of Work and Pensions to make information and the helpline number available through existing communications channels. Most importantly, for the elderly, Winter Fuel Payment letters and Cold Weather Payment alerts should be considered a priority as the policy focus is so closely linked to energy efficiency.
- Data on those receiving Pensions Credit is available to Warm Home Discount obligated energy companies via the innovative data-matching arrangement with DWP (1.1 million customers identified for the energy suppliers in 11/12). If this approach has been effective, DECC should consider whether there are other data sharing approaches that can allow ECO to be fulfilled as cost effectively as possible.
- DECC must continue to work with Department for Health (and the broader NHS) to make sure that campaigns around winter health include messages about warm, comfortable homes and how DECC policies can help.

### **Privately Rented Sector**

DECC should ensure that

- The department moves to consult on scope and structure for planned minimum standards for privately rented properties as soon as possible as these will help uptake of the Green Deal amongst some of the hardest to reach properties.

- Private Rented Sector Landlords and Housing Associations fully understand the Green Deal. Activity could include running seminars, providing materials and Ministerial involvement to encourage action.
- Green Deal and ECO have a champion within the Private Rented Sector e.g. the National Landlord Association or an individual appointed by DECC.

## **Communications**

- DECC must work with a wide range of partner organisations to reach these households. These are identified within the body of this report.
- Communication of the Green Deal by Government needs to be simple and easy to understand, accurate and consistent.
- DECC should develop a central web site providing information and access to the Green Deal.
- Messaging must cover both the Green Deal and ECO, and explain clearly how each works. Messages must balance marketing needs with ensuring that consumers are made aware of the implications of Green Deal elements that are pertinent to these households, such as energy usage being indicated as low in the Occupancy Assessment, or the size of potential early repayment fees

## **Review and Improvement**

- DECC should consider holding 6 monthly meetings to review take-up amongst hard to reach households and to identify what more can be done to increase take-up.

## **1. Terms of reference**

The overall aim of the Panel is to provide Government with recommendations on effective communication and engagement routes to reach the properties that are lived in by the poorest and hardest to reach in society. The ultimate aim is to drive uptake of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation amongst this customer group.

Panel members were asked to consider these specific objectives:

- the most important hard to reach groups for the Green Deal.
- the most effective means to engage with these different groups with regard to the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation.
- whether the branding is appropriate for the market and who needs to be the messenger.
- which barriers exist for take-up of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation, and how to overcome them.
- what networks and resources exist within the Panel membership and how can we use them effectively.
- how to ensure that hard to reach households have the necessary support to enable them to benefit from the Green Deal launch incentive scheme.

Following discussion amongst the Panel members and the submission of views from outside 'experts', the Panel will provide recommendations to DECC Ministers, in the form of a short report, on options for raising awareness of, and driving demand for, the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation.

In particular, the Panel will deliver an overview of the main barriers that exist for take-up of the Green Deal by hard to reach households and what messaging, channels and trusted intermediaries can be used to overcome these.

The composition of the panel is detailed in Annex A.

## **2. Key audiences – People and Properties**

The panel recommended that special attention is paid to the following occupier audiences by Government and those participating in the Green Deal and ECO.

### **Direct Recipients:**

- Benefit recipients
- Low income
- Older people
- Rural communities

- Those struggling to pay energy bills, including those already behind with payments

### **Joint Recipients:**

- Private Rented Sector landlords and tenants
- Social landlords and tenants
- Residential blocks – landowners

These groups include many individuals who are not digitally engaged, need help with form filling, or are not confident in dealing with financial information. There will also be those for whom English is not their first language. Physical challenges also can be expected, for example the need for assistance with loft clearance.

In addition to these occupiers, it should be recognised that certain types of landlord should also be considered hard to reach including those living outside the UK, those using letting agents to manage their properties, and those who are apathetic to the state of their property.

Government communication plans need also to recognise that their target audiences include the channels and intermediaries mapped out below – indeed getting these on board may well be the most important task.

### **3. Barriers**

Key barriers to access to the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation for these audiences are likely to include:

- **Creating an interest:** Hard to reach households and the most vulnerable may lack understanding of and interest in energy efficiency. Relevance to the individual may be perceived as low, especially if disengaged. Highly localised activity with respected partners may be one way to tackle this.
- **Demystifying the Green Deal finance plan:** Hard to reach households and the most vulnerable may have a general lack of confidence about financial information.

- Building trust: Some people may have a lack of trust due to prior negative experience with energy suppliers, door-to-door/ telephone sales, building contractors etc.
- Overcoming disruption: Particularly for the elderly, mentally or physically ill, the inevitable disruption that homes will experience through the Green Deal will be a key challenge.
- Ensuring inclusion of all hard to reach groups: The amount of time involved in supporting vulnerable households (who may have challenges around e.g. mobility, language, illness, abuse) may lead to Green Deal participants focusing on 'easier pickings' – or in additional costs which, if allocated directly to that household, might make the Golden Rule harder to meet
- Overcoming privacy concerns: Tenants eligible for ECO may not want their landlord to know that they are on benefits
- Facilitating collaboration between parties: Additional challenges are posed by the need to reach a multi-lateral agreement between tenants or property owners for the Green Deal to proceed in multi-tenant properties, including how the finance arrangements will work.

#### **4. How best to reach these audiences**

Panel members stressed the importance of using existing routes to find and talk to people.

Government should seek to use its own national and local channels as effectively as possible. Three key channels were identified where it should be possible to harness methods and communications already being used to convey the benefits of the Green Deal:

- working with DWP to include messages about the Green Deal and ECO in Winter Fuel Payment letters and other communications; if the current data matching arrangements on Warm Homes Discount have been effective, other data sharing with energy companies should be considered to make it as easy as possible to identify those eligible for ECO Affordable Warmth
- ensuring DH (and the broader NHS) campaigns around winter health included messages about warm, comfortable homes and how DECC policies can help

- encouraging Local Authorities to engage with residents – and also to consider other approaches to encourage property improvement (e.g. the possibility of selective licensing arrangements requiring landlords to make improvements to their properties)

The panel recommends that DECC not only progresses these specific ideas but looks actively at broader ways in which other Government departments and their publications, digital presence and campaigns can help. Job Centres, for example, would reach a large minority of those households we are concerned about.

Local authorities, their agencies and partners including Housing Associations can play a particularly important role. They are often trusted organisations themselves, but more importantly can act as a catalyst and coordinator linking local efforts and involving others. Town and parish councils will be important partners in building momentum and providing support for ‘street by street’ change, with local MPs and elected members also able to contribute. There is much evidence that area-based approaches to improving the energy efficiency of properties work particularly well: these local organisations, working with communities, are essential to developing and implementing these effectively.

The panel stressed the importance of working in partnership with networks, companies, organisations and individuals who are known to, in regular contact with, and trusted by the specific audience government or others seek to reach. Face to face advice will be of particular importance.

Energy suppliers will play a critical role. Consumers facing difficulties will contact them, and, through the Energy Company Obligation, they have a requirement to find many in the audiences set out above, and to reduce their energy costs through energy saving home improvements.

DECC, together with Green Deal Participants should also seek to enlist the support of other organisations and individuals including:

- Social workers, health visitors and charity support workers
- Health services including GP practices, pharmacies
- Age UK, Macmillan Trust, MENCAP, Shelter
- Faith groups, community leaders

- Community organisations (especially those linked to community purchasing projects) and Energy Agencies supporting community groups
- Private Rented Sector and Social Housing Landlords including Housing Associations

The role of peers should not be forgotten: word of mouth from friends, neighbours and family can play a key role in spreading understanding and enthusiasm for change, assuming of course that the initial experience is satisfactory.

## **5. Role of intermediaries**

In addition to those who might provide direct channels to reach audiences, the panel identified others who could play an important role.

The involvement of large national companies, respected and well known, would help build trust and confidence in the Green Deal.

Citizens Advice Bureaux are expected to provide support in multiple ways. They are often a key advisor to those struggling financially in general and, more specifically, to those finding it difficult to keep up with their energy bills. In addition, they will be a source of advice to those considering a Green Deal and an important resource for those who, for example, might have a question or problem after a Green Deal plan has been taken up and installation completed. It will be critical to ensure that advisors in the CAB and elsewhere are kept up to date on the Green Deal as it develops.

Estate and Letting Agents will also be important: their support could reinforce the benefits of buying or renting a property with a Green Deal, and encouragement for landlords to improve their properties. A lack of support could provide a significant barrier to take-up.

## **6. Support and Engagement**

Panel members recognised that many individuals within the hard to reach audiences may need support to understand and navigate the Green Deal and to ensure that services are sold appropriately. The Panel also recognised that the Green Deal should only be sold where appropriate for hard to reach households. If households express reluctance to take on credit, or concerns at the complexity or terms of the product, they should not be sold the Green Deal

Those who are already in regular contact with and supporting individuals will be key. In addition to those outlined in section 4, panellists noted family, carers and guardians as particularly important in dealing with the vulnerable.

It is critical that Green Deal Participants, especially Assessors, guide eligible consumers to access the Energy Company Obligation Affordable Warmth funding.

Participants will need to allow for the additional time required to ensure there is a good understanding of what is being sold/ provided: reassurance may need to be given through the life of a project, from initial contact and assessment, through to installation (and beyond).

As outlined in section 5 with regard to CAB, consideration needs to be given to how those providing support can be kept up to date, so that advice given is accurate.

The Energy Saving Advice Service helpline will potentially be a useful source of independent advice, not only for individuals directly, but also for those who are supporting them.

## **7. Communications**

The range of support/ offers available to consumers from DECC and other Government departments – directly or through e.g. energy companies - is complex. DECC need to develop a clear route for consumers and intermediaries to navigate their way through these to find those that are most appropriate to them.

Communication of the Green Deal by Government must be simple and easy to understand, accurate and consistent.

DECC needs to work with a wide range of partner organisations to reach these audiences. It will be important to build their needs into communications plans, including considering how to ensure they have up to date information.

### **Mechanisms:**

The panel recommend that DECC consumer engagement plans include:

- **A single website** that can provide impartial and independent advice. This should include:
  - A clear route-map for owner-occupier, tenant and landlord

- A list of authorised Assessors, Providers and Installers
  - Guides that are simple to understand covering key user groups
  - Key Q+As which could be submitted by the DECC panels e.g. clarifying the relationship between landlord and tenant.
  - Helpline numbers (The panel recognise the important role that the Energy Saving Advice Service helpline, already in operation, will play).
- **A Facebook-App** might be a useful tool for communicating with the Hardest to Reach. Whilst not all homes will have internet connection, a sizeable proportion of the population now has smart-phones with internet access.
  - **Leaflet** drops to hard to reach households might prove useful e.g. Digital UK had a strong national presence and specifically targeted their communications at those most in need.
  - DECC should monitor the forms used within the Green Deal, including the household **energy assessment**, to ensure that consumers find them clear and easy to digest. DECC must ensure that the assessment strikes the right balance of information for the consumer.
  - **Big Energy Saving Week** would provide a useful time in the calendar to annually push the Green Deal. Many organisations are already involved in promoting this initiative and DECC should ensure that the communications distributed contain information on how the Green Deal could save families money.
  - **Communicating the Green Deal through other Government departments' interventions** e.g. Department of Health/PCT flu jab letters; DWP Winter Fuel Payment/Cold Weather Payment letters.

#### **Messages:**

- DECC's communication strategy should develop a very strong consumer benefits message in its marketing campaign, drawing on existing well documented research of key drivers. The panel believe that this is likely to emphasise cost savings and keeping warm.

- Messaging must cover both the Green Deal and ECO, and explain clearly how each works

## **8. Monitoring and evaluation**

DECC should monitor progress of the Green Deal and ECO to understand which hard to reach audiences are – and are not - accessing and benefitting from its policies. In particular, thought should be given to how to understand who is being lost from the system/ fallen out of the process – from analysis of helpline calls, assessments through to successful installations, supported by more qualitative exploration of potential problems and opportunities to improve the process.

## **Annex A:**

### **Panel composition**

Laura Sandys MP – Chair

Citizens Advice

Warm Zones

Which?

Energy UK

Local Government Association

Stroud District Council

Centre of Sustainable Energy

National Association of Estate Agents

Association of Residential Letting Agents

National Energy Action

Consumer Focus

National Landlords Association

London School Economics

Newcastle City Council

National Landlords Association

Age UK

## **Annex B**

List of evidence provided to the panel has been published alongside this report and is available online as a PDF document.