UK Government

RAF048/2324: Evaluation of the consumer advice and information programme

Local Energy Advice Demonstrator programme and Home Retrofit Advice and Information Line

Final report

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2026)

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Introduction

This is the final report for the evaluation of the Consumer Advice and Information (CAI) Programme. The evaluation was conducted for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) by Winning Moves, Energy Saving Trust and Brook Lyndhurst.

The programme, delivered between 2023 and 2025, is a multi-channel advice service, providing online information tools (outside the scope of the evaluation), the Home Retrofit Advice and Information Line (phoneline) and Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) programme (both within the scope of this evaluation). These services are aimed at the private housing sector (i.e., owner-occupiers, private landlords and their tenants)—particularly households who are hard-to-reach (HTR)[1] (e.g. the digitally excluded) and/or live in a hard-to-decarbonise (HTD)[2] property. The services provided impartial advice about retrofitting residents homes, aiming to help households—in particular fuel poor households—reduce their energy bills and carbon emissions while improving comfort.

The evaluation was developed based on the programme Theory of Change. It comprised a programme of research including surveys, qualitative interviews, ethnography and desk-based research to provide a detailed analysis of:

- How the services were delivered and experienced by users, identifying successes and challenges faced in delivery (process evaluation)
- The extent to which the services achieved their stated objectives (outcome evaluation)
- The extent to which the policy represented value-for-money (VfM) to the public purse (economic evaluation)[3]

All primary research cited in this report was conducted between April 2024 and March 2025. Conclusions have been based on multiple evidence sources wherever possible. Where only a single evidence source was available, any limitations of that evidence are summarised.

[1] The definition of hard-to-reach has been deliberately broad from the project outset. It is defined in the initial call for projects as *"Less internet-literate, elderly, fuel poor, off gas grid, minority ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, those with disabilities, those sensitive to internal disruption in homes, etc,"*

[2] The call for projects defined this as *"listed buildings/conservation areas, planning restrictions, non-standard construction, terraced homes, flats, off-gas-grid homes, poorly performing homes, etc."*

[3] The Value for Money (VfM) assessment has adopted a 4 Es framework, examining Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Cost-effectiveness, and Equity, to provide a comprehensive view of how well the LEAD programme used its resources to achieve outcomes

Home Retrofit Advice and Information Line

During the two-year period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2025 there were 16,029 calls to the Home Retrofit Advice and Information Line, of which 12,555 were in-scope.[4] This represents 16,019 unique customers, with 12,546 customers advised on in-scope topics.

Who has been reached?

The assessment of who has been reached by the phoneline is reliant on survey data.[5] Based on self-reported characteristics from the survey, 45% of respondents could be classified as hard-to-reach, and 55% living in hard-to-decarbonise properties (76% of respondents were either hard-to-reach or living in a hard-to-decarbonise property, 26% were both, and 24% were neither). The survey shows that phoneline users are less wealthy than average, with a high proportion in receipt of benefits, and more likely to be disabled, providing evidence that the phoneline has met its objective of supporting hard-to-reach groups. In terms of digital exclusion, 17% of respondents did not have access to the internet at home—compared to 4% of the general population—showing the phoneline supports customers who are more likely to be digitally excluded. Those who did have internet access generally felt confident using it, with evidence from qualitative research suggesting that the phoneline also supports consumers who prefer speaking directly to someone to better understand government application processes, or to understand how different measures might work for them, as well as those without digital access or confidence.

Customer experience

Service data for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2025 shows that customers primarily called to get advice on government schemes (47% of all calls). Most survey respondents cited calling to receive information on government schemes (68%) and to check their eligibility (52%). Following the advice received through the phoneline, 46% of survey respondents looked for more information from other sources, and 44% went on to check their eligibility for a government scheme, with 30% applying to one. 40% went on to contact their energy supplier about financial support for energy efficiency measures. 15% had gone on to successfully install a measure in their home, with a further 10% in progress or planned.

Customer satisfaction with the overall service was high (95% satisfied) immediately after an (in-scope) call to the phoneline,[6] but by the time of the evaluation survey 3-8 months later, satisfaction had declined to 61% among survey respondents. Evidence suggests the drop in satisfaction may reflect negative experiences when seeking financial support after receiving advice through the phoneline, with those still awaiting confirmation of eligibility reporting lower rates of satisfaction than those who had successfully completed installations. Respondents

[4] Count of all calls with call reasons assigned minus those recorded as “Not in scope”.
[5] The survey data represents a non-random sample of 10% of those who called the phoneline during the timeframe covered by the survey. Further details of the evaluation customer dataset, survey sampling and the methodological limitations are provided in the technical methods annex.
[6] Source: ResQ post-call customer satisfaction data, average score from 3 questions, for customers advised during April 2023 to March 2025, 95% of customers rated the service at satisfactory (6 or above) immediately after a call. For details of the CSAT questions see technical annex.

cited lack of progress as the key reason for dissatisfaction (28%), followed by not having received the help they needed (27%), and ineligibility for schemes (14%).

How effective was the phoneline?

Stakeholder research and monitoring data show the service effectively raises awareness of and facilitates access to government schemes. However, it is less effective at delivering tailored advice on measures. Following use of the phoneline, customers showed a slight increase in their understanding of energy efficiency measures, including their costs and benefits and the steps needed to install them—though confidence in the quality, functionality and cost-effectiveness of measures largely remained unchanged.

The phoneline number was listed on GOV.UK, Citizens Advice websites, Department for Work & Pensions letters, and energy supplier letters, which generated a significant number of calls. However, greater targeted promotion of how the service can advise customers on energy efficiency and low carbon heat measures could have helped shift the focus from providing information and advice on government schemes.

Was the service value for money?

There is clear evidence that the intended customers and outcomes are being met. However, without DESNZ forecasts or a comparator service as a reference, it is challenging to assess whether the observed outputs and outcomes represent value for money.

The service has been delivered below the maximum two-year contract value. The service handled an average of 25 calls per day. There is some evidence of economies of scale, although service costs were not significantly reduced during periods of lower call volumes, as originally envisaged by DESNZ.

The service successfully reached its target populations of hard-to-reach households living in hard-to-decarbonise properties. The evaluation suggests there may remain latent demand from consumers who were not made aware of the service through the channels detailed above, who might be reached through further targeted promotion.

Local Energy Advice Demonstrators (LEAD)

In August 2023, 36 projects across England were awarded funding to design and deliver local, personalised home retrofit advice in order to test different customer engagement and advice delivery approaches.[7] Like the phoneline, the service had an explicit focus on serving hard-to-reach households and those living in hard-to-decarbonise homes.

Collectively, the LEAD projects adopted a wide range of delivery models, target audiences and advice styles, from home visits to attending events or community groups. Projects also varied in scale.

The evaluation adopted a case study approach to enable greater depth of insight into a sample of projects.[8] While analysis of programme monitoring data included all LEAD projects, primary research focused on a subset of 13 projects.

What was achieved?

Collectively, the projects provided **78,553** customers with bespoke advice against a baseline forecast of 87,216 (i.e. achieving 90% against this target). Performance across the projects was mixed, with 13 out of 36 projects meeting or exceeding their target. To an extent, this was to be expected for a test and learn programme, with some of the innovative methods tested proving less effective. Projects also tended to be overly ambitious in the forecasts included in their funding bids, and some found it took more time and resource to engage customers than anticipated.

Projects report that 10,459 customers have installed energy efficiency measures to date, representing 13% of all customers advised, which is a lower conversion rate than anticipated. However, the primary research suggests this number could be higher due to the typical length of the retrofit journey; this is a lagging indicator, and more customers are likely to install measures in future on the basis of LEAD advice. Measures installed by customers advised vary widely, and include clean heat technologies, insulation and smaller measures such as draught proofing, radiator reflectors and energy saving light bulbs.

Who has been reached?

Projects successfully identified, reached and engaged hard-to-reach and hard-to-decarbonise households, under the broad definitions adopted by CAI.[9] They have served both low-income (under £30,000 per year) and able-to-pay (income over £30,000) households. Service users' knowledge of and interest in energy efficiency measures also varied widely.

Customer experience

Service users were generally satisfied with the content and mode of advice, although they sometimes felt it could be better tailored to their circumstances. Customers valued friendly

[7] However, only 35 projects started delivery.
[8] Selection was based on the extent to which projects had contact details for their customers (to enable primary research in the evaluation), where good progress had been made in engaging customers and where projects were using particularly interesting approaches (to gather useful lessons learned).
[9] This includes those over the age of 65, ethnic minorities, and customers with a physical or mental health condition.

advisers who they could relate to, who took time to listen to their needs, did not judge or patronise, and provided practical advice and support – such as adjusting boiler settings or Thermostatic Radiator Valves (TRVs), or applying for funding on their behalf. However, many customers struggled with the onward customer journey, both due to a lack of follow-up support and challenges accessing funding, which remains a key barrier for many.

Projects have been effective at moving some customers along the customer journey to retrofit. This includes increasing their understanding of energy efficiency measures, and to a lesser extent increasing customer confidence in measures and their intention to install.

The extent to which projects were able to increase customer understanding was affected by the type of customer:

- Customers with a household income over £30,000 were more likely to report an increase in understanding compared to lower income households.
- Fewer hard-to-reach customers reported an increase in understanding.

Increases in customer understanding were also affected by project and the type of advice provided (discussed further below).

How effective was LEAD?

Despite differences in delivery models and challenges in analysing inconsistent outcome data, several projects appear to have delivered strong results in their specific contexts. Some scored highly across a wide range of outcome measures, with survey responses indicating improved understanding and decision-making. Others achieved positive outcomes while supporting large numbers of hard-to-reach households, and one was particularly effective in supporting uptake of government funding schemes. However, results should be interpreted with caution due to the likelihood that survey responses overrepresent those who received more intensive support, and differences in the characteristics of households supported across projects make it difficult to compare their effectiveness.

Among the project case studies explored by this evaluation, those that:

(i) tailored the advice to the needs of individual customers
(ii) conducted home visits / surveys
(iii) communicated findings, actions and next steps in a report

often had higher proportions of customers with positive outcomes (e.g. increases in understanding, satisfaction with the service). Where advice was lighter touch, this resulted in lower proportions of customers reporting positive outcomes.

In-depth approaches are inevitably more resource intensive and are more costly to deliver. The evidence suggests that the higher cost does increase customers' confidence that the advice is accurate, enables it to be more tailored to the customer and their home, and increases trust in the advice and the likelihood of taking subsequent action. Reports help customers to make informed decisions.

Other key lessons include:

- **In person engagement** is effective at engaging customers who would have not otherwise engaged with energy efficiency advice.
- **Being seen as impartial and measure-agnostic is important for gaining customer trust** (which is essential for effective engagement). In general, the delivery organisations were trusted by customers, though some projects found that it was effective to gain 'endorsement' from other trusted organisations e.g. GPs, Citizens Advice, employers.
- **Advisers need both interpersonal and technical skills** to convince the customer that the advice is trustworthy and accurate, and to encourage them to take next steps. Customers who are self-funding measures, particularly larger scale measures, require advisers with a stronger technical skill set.
- **There is customer appetite for advice over multiple interactions and follow-up support**. Projects learned that customers need and would like more follow-up support to keep them engaged as they progress through the onward retrofit journey. This includes further support to understand the potential return on investment for customers considering self-funding measures; support to engage and quality assure installers; and further opportunities to ask questions, discuss options and check progress. Some hard-to-reach customers need 'hand-holding' support to overcome the barriers they face, such as completing forms on their behalf, contacting suppliers and installers, or being present in the home while works are carried out.

There were several common barriers to action following advice:

- **Many customers cannot afford to self-fund measures**. Projects reported that customers with a household income of £30,000-£60,000 do not have disposable income to invest in measures. Some customers in this group cited affordability as the key barrier, while others simply felt that the return on investment was not worthwhile. There was interest from some customers for information about finance options to pay for measures, and projects suggested that this is something they would need to provide advice on in any future support.
- Projects aimed to support customers in accessing **funding streams** (e.g. HUG, GBIS, ECO) to support the cost of installing measures. They spent a large amount of time informing customers about funding, checking their eligibility, completing applications and chasing progress on behalf of customers. In some cases, this led to successful installations, however the process length and changing eligibility criteria/spending priorities for some schemes meant that not as many customers progressed to installation as anticipated.[10]

[10] ECO/GBIS changes came into effect in July 2025, though some were backdated to November 2024. This included an expansion of eligible measure combinations. See https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/energy-company-obligation-4-and-the-great-british-insulation-scheme-mid-scheme-changes/outcome/energy-company-obligation-4-and-the-great-british-insulation-scheme-mid-scheme-changes-final-stage-impact-assessment for details.

- **Availability of trusted installers** was cited by some projects and customers as an issue. Some customers would value impartial advice on which installers to engage and impartial quality assurance on work completed, both of which were outside of the remit of the LEAD programme.
- **Issues with the property:** project advisers found that a considerable number of homes they visited were in a state of disrepair and would need significant maintenance or ancillary works before measures could be effectively installed. Some customers could not afford or were unable to prepare properties for measures, e.g. clearing lofts to support new insulation. These activities cannot be funded under existing schemes.

Did LEAD represent value for money?

Taken together, the LEAD programme offers strong evidence of efficient and inclusive delivery, with several projects achieving good value for money across multiple dimensions. However, shortcomings in the data available for this evaluation—such as a lack of itemised input cost data, ambiguous definitions for key performance indicators, and gaps in survey coverage—mean it is challenging to make definitive, comparative judgements for all projects. Future programmes would benefit from greater clarity around expectations (and obligations) for monitoring, which would facilitate value-for-money evaluation.

Key findings:

- **Economy (were resources acquired at the right cost?)**
  The programme maintained strong control over spending, with most projects delivering within or below their allocated budgets. DESNZ financial oversight during delivery played a key role in safeguarding public funds. However, economy could have been strengthened through clearer expectations and more consistent scrutiny of cost assumptions at the application stage.

- **Efficiency (were outputs delivered proportionate to costs?)**
  Almost all case study projects delivered at a lower cost-per-transaction than they had forecast in bids, suggesting efficient use of resources. Variation between projects largely reflects differences in the intensity of support offered e.g. the share of customers receiving a home visit. Some projects delivered advice at a low cost-per-transaction relative to other projects offering a similar intensity of support—though these tended to be projects based in more affluent areas, which served fewer hard-to-reach households (which may be less resource-intensive). Variation in projects' interpretation of key performance indicators and a lack of standardised output measures make it difficult to compare efficiency across projects in a consistent way.

- **Cost-effectiveness (did projects deliver meaningful outcomes relative to their cost?)**
  The evaluation found that different delivery models can be cost-effective in different contexts. Two projects demonstrated strong value for money, combining high outcome performance with relatively low costs, despite having contrasting approaches. One operated in an affluent area, using local partnerships and volunteers, while the other supported a high proportion of low-income and disabled households through an in-house model. Other

projects showed promise in specific areas, such as driving retrofit uptake or grant applications, but data limitations make it difficult to draw robust conclusions from those findings. Overall, no single delivery model or approach was consistently associated with strong cost-effectiveness. Home visits featured in several of the more successful projects—but their impact appears to have been dependent on local context and the quality of the advice. Further research would be needed to understand which specific elements of these projects made them cost-effective.

- **Equity (did projects reach those most in need and ensure fair access to support?)** The programme engaged a diverse range of vulnerable and hard-to-reach households, with particularly strong representation among older people, disabled individuals, low-income households, and those without internet access. However, there were significant differences between projects. Several engaged a high proportion of households meeting multiple indicators of vulnerability, whereas two projects engaged fewer such households. These differences appear to reflect both the characteristics of the local population and the targeting approach adopted by each project. Some were designed specifically to support disadvantaged households, while others also aimed to reach the general or “able to pay” market. Many projects adapted their approach to meet the needs of hard-to-reach groups, through in-person engagement, home visits, and advocacy-style support. While outcomes for these groups were generally lower, reflecting the greater barriers they face, there were some examples which demonstrated that equitable outcomes can be achieved with a well-designed approach.

Glossary

Term	Definition
CEF	The Community Energy Fund (CEF) is a £10m grant scheme for urban and rural communities to develop energy services to benefit their local area.
Citizens Advice	A network of independent charities which offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free. Key areas of support include applying for Universal Credit, money or debt and problems with a purchase or service received.
ECO	The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) places an obligation on medium and large energy suppliers to deliver measures that improve the ability of low-income, fuel-poor and vulnerable households to heat their homes. The scheme has seen 5 iterations, ECO1, ECO2, ECO2t, ECO3 and ECO4. ECO4 applies to measures installed from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2026 and takes a 'whole house' approach.
EPC	An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) tells you how energy efficient a property is. You must have an EPC when you're selling a property, renting out a property or building a new property.
GBIS	The Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) places an obligation on medium and large energy companies to deliver measures that result in reduced energy usage. The scheme complements ECO4, and mostly delivers single insulation measures. As well as supporting low-income and vulnerable households, it is also available to those who aren't low income or on means-tested benefits living in homes with an Energy Performance Certificate rating of D-G, and within Council Tax bands A-D in England and A-E in Scotland and Wales.
GOV.UK	HM Government website. The place to find government services and information online.
HTD	Hard-to-decarbonise homes. These properties more difficult to retrofit with energy efficiency and clean heating measures, due to their age, construction type, location, heritage value, or existing standard of

	insulation. Note that a narrower definition has been adopted by DESNZ since the drafting of this report.
HTR	Hard-to-reach households. The definition of hard-to-reach has been deliberately broad from the project outset and was defined in the initial call for projects as *"Less internet-literate, elderly, fuel poor, off gas grid, minority ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, those with disabilities, those sensitive to internal disruption in homes, etc".*
HUG	The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) provided energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating via local authorities to households in England that are low income, off the gas grid, have an EPC between D and G. This was superseded by Warm Homes: Local Grant.
FWTSE	Find Ways To Save Energy (FWTSE) is a web tool that allows users to input key details about their property and returns information about ways in which they could save energy (and thus costs) in their homes. https://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency
Net Zero Hubs	The Local Net Zero Hubs programme helps local authorities and communities in England to play a leading role in decarbonisation, supporting local authorities to develop net zero projects and attract commercial investment.
Private Rented Sector Regulations	The Private Rental Sector (PRS) is a classification of housing in the UK, where a landlord owns the property and leases it to a tenant. Properties must meet a minimum energy efficiency standard of EPC E. Landlords must provide an Energy Performance Certificate for the property.
SHDF	The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) was designed to bring a significant proportion of the UK social housing stock to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band C standard. It supports the installation of energy performance measures in social homes in England. This has been superseded by The Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund.
WHD	The Warm Home Discount (WHD) Scheme is a one-off £150 discount off electricity bills. If consumers are eligible, electricity suppliers will apply the discount to bills.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

To meet the government's commitment to reach Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the UK will need to decarbonise most of its buildings by this time. With over a fifth of UK greenhouse gas emissions coming from heating buildings, the 2021 Heat and Buildings Strategy set out the government's plan to significantly cut carbon emissions from the UK's 30 million homes. In England, the government has also set targets to improve the energy efficiency of homes to alleviate fuel poverty.

Home energy efficiency upgrades are complex, and there is mounting evidence that shortcomings in the customer journey and availability of impartial, independent advice are limiting consumer action towards home decarbonisation and uptake of government energy efficiency schemes.[11] Ensuring consumers have access to independent and government-endorsed information on energy efficient home upgrades is a DESNZ priority.

The government's Consumer Advice and Information (CAI) programme aimed to:

- Enhance the government-led home energy advice offer, meeting the immediate need to better support consumers with advice and information to improve the energy efficiency of their homes
- Test and learn what approaches, particularly at a local level, are most effective in supporting widespread consumer action towards
- Facilitate consumer access to government schemes by acquiring new customers
- Support the effective delivery of wider funding schemes and regulatory requirements by identifying and sharing learning, improving value for money and regulatory compliance

The CAI programme sought to achieve this by providing private sector households (i.e. homeowners, private landlords and their tenants) with impartial advice and information. It comprised three workstreams, designed to interact and support each other, sharing learning and best practice. Only the local advice and phoneline components of the programme are in scope for this evaluation.

1. Home Retrofit Advice and Information Line

The phoneline service was launched in March 2023 and remains operational. It provides consumers in England with impartial home energy retrofit advice. This component of the programme represents £1.25m in funding.

[11] Evidence includes research conducted with 4,298 homeowners in England by Censuswide on behalf of Energy Saving Trust in August 2023, and research on consumer protection: Consumer protection in the green heating and insulation sector

The phoneline was designed to provide a 'digital assist' channel for the *Find Ways to Save Energy in Your Home* and scheme eligibility checker services on GOV.UK (in keeping with the Government Digital Service manual requirement for assisted digital support). More broadly, it provides the digitally excluded and wider public with general energy efficiency advice.

During the call, customers are asked a series of questions about their property characteristics, which generates a set of information about their house suitability for home energy performance improvements, how to carry out these improvements cost-effectively, and where to find further support, including information on Government grants and funding schemes.

2. Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) projects

The Local Energy Advice Demonstrator programme ran from July 2023 to March 2025. Following a competitive application process, 36 projects were awarded funding to trial a range of innovative approaches to delivering local, in-person advice across England.[12]

This component of the programme represents £19.9 million in funding, with project budgets ranging from £100k to £1.9 million. The projects were delivered through the five regional Net Zero Hubs in England.

These projects provided an opportunity to test and learn from different approaches to addressing the advice needs of groups whose needs may not be met by other services, such as:

- Consumer groups that are most likely to benefit from targeted in-person advice, such as HTR consumers
- Consumers living in properties that are HTD, such as traditional and listed buildings, and homes in conservation areas

3. Online (not within the scope of this evaluation)

The above services complement a suite of information tools available on the GOV.UK website. These tools are the *Find Ways to Save Energy in Your Home* service (launched in July 2022) and eligibility checker/referral services for the Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) and Home Upgrade Grant phase 2 (HUG2) (which went live in September 2023). As they remain in development, these GOV.UK services were outside the scope of this evaluation.

[12] Of which 35 progressed to delivery.

1.2 Evaluation aims

An independent evaluation was commissioned to assess:

- How the programme was delivered and experienced by users, identifying successes and challenges faced in delivery (process evaluation)
- The extent to which the programme achieved its stated objectives (outcome evaluation)
- The extent to which the policy represented value for money (VfM) to the public purse (economic evaluation)

The evaluation findings will inform the department's understanding of how the public seek and respond to information about home energy upgrades, including:

- how different methods of energy efficiency advice can reach and support different consumer groups
- best practice in delivering local, in-person advice
- whether further intervention is needed in the consumer home energy advice sector

The evaluation also seeks to examine the role of consumer advice in supporting public awareness and take up of government funding schemes such as the Home Upgrade Grant and the Energy Company Obligation—helping maximise the impact of Government funds and driving the pace of retrofit required to meet net zero targets.

1.3 Evaluation approach and timings

This evaluation was conducted by a consortium of Winning Moves Ltd, Energy Saving Trust, and Brook Lyndhurst.

Due to differences in the scope and nature of the phoneline and LEAD, distinct evaluations were undertaken for each service, though the evaluations were designed to answer the same set of questions.

Structured by a Theory of Change and contribution claims, each evaluation took a mixed-method analytical approach, drawing on programme documentation and monitoring data, qualitative primary research with staff involved in service design and delivery, and primary research (both quantitative and qualitative) with service users. The Theories of Change, contribution claims and approach to contribution analysis are set out in the technical annex to this report.

For both the phoneline and LEAD, analysis was conducted for each element of research (survey, qualitative interviews, monitoring data). The assessment of contribution claims was drawn from the Theory of Change at programme, service or project level.

Conclusions have been based on evidence from more than one evidence source wherever possible. Where only single sources were available the limitations with that evidence are summarised.

The evaluation of the LEAD programme used a case study approach. While monitoring data was analysed for all projects, but primary data collection focused on 13 of the 36 projects.[13] A systematic analysis of each of these case study projects was conducted, synthesising and triangulating all evidence, with consideration of the robustness and reliability of each source. This enabled a rounded view of what each project achieved with consideration of its unique context.

The technical annex to this report sets out the evaluation research questions and their coverage, as well as details on the methods employed and their limitations. The work has been undertaken in compliance with ISO20252, the International Standard for Social and Market Research. Winning Moves is registered to the Standard.

1.4 Report structure

This report includes separate chapters for the evaluations of the phoneline and LEAD. Each chapter follows a similar structure:

- A description of service aims and rationale
- A summary of the evaluation methodology
- Findings in response to the evaluation questions
- Conclusions on the service from evaluation evidence

A final concluding chapter summarises findings that are applicable to both services, with wider relevance for consumer advice and information policy.

[13] Primary research focused on a subset of projects that were able to provide sufficient number of customer contact details to enable meaningful research. More detail about this approach can be found in section 3.2 and in the technical annex to this report.

2 Home Retrofit Advice & Information Line

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises the final evaluation of the Home Retrofit Advice & Information Line ("the phoneline"). It covers service need and development, a summary of the evaluation methodology, and key findings from the primary research and subsequent analysis. Findings cover the process of delivery to date, service reach, the impacts of the service and a value-for-money assessment.

2.2 Background

The phoneline service was first committed to in April 2022 within the British Energy Security Strategy, against a backdrop of increasing gas prices for households.[14] Improving the energy efficiency of homes was identified to bring down energy bills in the long term. The strategy identified the importance of trusted advice, including that delivered through telephone support:

> *"Research suggests the government is the trusted source of advice so we will work with trusted voices to scale up our information offer to help households understand energy saving measures… We will launch additional support for homeowners through telephone support and specific local area advice for energy consumers"*
>
> (British Energy Security Strategy, page 13)

Funding for the phoneline service was approved in July 2022 as part of the Consumer Advice and Information (CAI) programme.

2.2.1 Service aims and rationale for intervention

The phoneline aimed to:

- **Reach the digitally excluded and digitally reluctant**
  The phoneline would support digitally excluded and digitally reluctant consumers not sufficiently served by the digital tools provided on GOV.UK webpages (i.e. act as a 'digital assist'), in keeping with Government Digital Service manual requirements and WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standards (which require that services are accessible to all users).

- **Help consumers understand options suggested by the digital tools in more detail**
  The phoneline would allow consumers to speak to a trained advisor to discuss each retrofit option provided in the *Find Ways to Save Energy* (FWTSE) tool in more detail and to help them understand the potential costs, benefits and disruption that retrofit may cause, by

[14] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62611337d3bf7f55cc9fd89f/british-energy-security-strategy-print-ready.pdf

discussing their specific circumstances. The customer could either complete the FWTSE assessment and save a copy of the action plan to discuss with an advisor, or the advisor would help them complete the assessment during the call. The phoneline was anticipated to provide a greater depth of advice when compared to the predecessor *Simple Energy Advice* (SEA) digital assist phoneline service.

- **Provide in-depth advice and support on capital schemes**
  The phoneline would help potential applicants understand what fabric and heating measures may be appropriate for their properties and their eligibility for government scheme support. Again, the phoneline was expected to provide a digital assist service for the Home Upgrade Grant 2 (HUG2) and Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) eligibility checkers and referral services.

- **Assist private landlords**
  The phoneline would help landlords in understanding their Energy Performance Certificates and/or applying for exemptions from the Private Rented Sector Regulations where required.

- **General Energy efficiency advice and home retrofit support**
  Beyond supporting specific digital tools and capital schemes, the phoneline also aimed to serve as a trusted source of general energy efficiency and home retrofit advice. Specially trained, dedicated advisors would provide personalised guidance on improving energy performance across a wide range of property types and circumstances, helping consumers understand holistic retrofit approaches and long-term energy-saving strategies. This broader support was intended to empower consumers to make informed decisions about their homes, even if they were not currently eligible for funding schemes, and to encourage uptake of energy efficiency improvements more widely.

2.3 Evaluation methodology

The overall evaluation design and approach is set out in section 1.3 above. Specific methods used to evaluate the phoneline were as follows:

- Desk review of programme documentation and data, including recent reports of research commissioned by DESNZ, the outline and full business case, service contract and other service management documents
- Analysis of the phoneline service dataset containing records of all call instances
- 3 in-depth interviews with DESNZ policy and delivery staff involved in the development and current delivery of the phoneline
- Site visit to the contractor delivering the phoneline service (ResQ) on 10th April 2024 - including in-person interview, call observation and discussion with advisors
- Two phases of qualitative interviews (targeting the same group of customers) who called the phoneline November-December 2023. Wave 1 achieved 33 interviews (which were

conducted April-July 2024), and Wave 2 (conducted January 2025) with re-interviewed 22 of these 33 to capture longer-term experiences.

- A telephone survey with 437 unique individuals (conducted in two tranches, August-September 2024, and January-February 2025) who called the phoneline between January to October 2024 inclusive (i.e. 2-8 months prior to interview). A census of customers who opted in to being included in the dataset was used, with a response rate of 15%. In total, this represents 10% of the customers who called the phoneline during that time (4,588 unique customers, excluding out of scope calls). Survey data was not weighted, as there was no data within the sample frame to weight against.
- Analysis of service cost and call data and findings from customer research, to support a value for money assessment of the service.

The technical annex to this report details a programme theory of change, evaluation objectives, associated research questions, and offers a more detailed description of the evaluation methodology.

2.3.1 Strength and limitations of evidence

Table 1: Strength of evidence

Theme	Strength of evidence
Development and delivery of the phoneline	Evidence is strong. We have not found significant ambiguity or inconsistencies in what was described by different stakeholders or when cross referenced to the sources used in the desk review. Only a small number of calls were observed during the ResQ site visit, but these provided valuable insights into how advisors handle diverse enquiries and challenging situations, although it was not practical to corroborate this (e.g. by listening to recordings of phone calls).
Monitoring data	Strength of evidence is moderate. The service data lacks customer demographics, property age, type and EPC rating, preventing targeted sampling and survey weighting or representativeness checks. This meant relying on customer research when assessing who the service had reached. The final service dataset contained more detailed call outcomes, although 5% of calls are missing a call outcome.
Customer research	Strength of evidence is moderate. • The timing at which the interviews were conducted may have affected interviewee's perspectives. This is particularly the case for households taking part in the surveys, as participants

Theme	Strength of evidence
	may have responded months after they received advice, risking recall bias. We had to balance this concern with our desire to gather evidence on longer-term perspectives of the services and consumers' subsequent action. • Our survey was unable to use random probability sampling due to low numbers of customers who opted in to (a) be recontacted by evaluators and (b) complete the survey (with opt-in rates of 63% and 15% respectively). Our survey sample comprises 10% of customers who called the phoneline 3-8 months prior to fieldwork. The non-random nature of this sample could bias survey estimates. To mitigate these limitations: • We adopted a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, which enabled us to capture both the frequency of different experience and perceptions, as well as greater depth of understanding of different customer journeys. • To maintain recall accuracy for the survey, respondents were not surveyed beyond 8 months after their phoneline interaction (e.g. for wave 1, customers advised between January 2023 and March 2024 were surveyed in August/September 2024). • To allow us to establish longer-term perspectives and impacts of the phoneline, we conducted qualitative follow-up interviews up to 14 months after phoneline interaction; with the in-depth approach allowing participants to be able to reflect further back, which a short survey would not have allowed for. • Conducting two waves of the survey has provided us with a larger sample size and allows greater confidence in the findings.
Value for money	• Strength of evidence is moderate. • The assessment lacked DESNZ forecasts for outputs and outcomes, and a suitable comparator phoneline service to compare actual costs, outputs and outcomes. • The lack of demographic monitoring data meant the assessment of equity is reliant on survey data, so the same limitations with survey data detailed above apply.

2.4 Evaluation Findings

2.4.1 What aspects of the service are working well/less well?

2.4.1.1 Specifying the service

An existing government contact centre supplier framework was used to procure the phoneline service,[15] offering a faster solution than an open tender route. The use of an existing supplier framework helped achieve the objectives of launching the service by winter 2022-23 and ensuring continuity of government advice provision.

ResQ and DESNZ reached an agreement about the types and complexity of information (particularly in relation to technologies) to be provided to callers. During the first year of service, DESNZ worked with ResQ to develop a focused information hub for advisors to use to support customers' needs.

2.4.1.2 Promoting the service

During development it was envisaged the phoneline would be promoted among the "not digitally able" via other services/organisations.

Promotion of the service to date has relied on GOV.UK, Citizens Advice websites, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communications and energy supplier letters. This approach has generated 12,676 in-scope calls between April 2023 to March 2025.

The service dealt with unanticipated spikes in call demand (including out of scope calls) resulting from consumer communications arranged by other DESNZ teams. The example provided by stakeholders was inclusion of the phoneline number in a Warm Homes Discount letter; the CAI programme and ResQ were unaware of this communication and ResQ were unable to concurrently increase capacity through an increase in call handlers.

Stakeholders also described the phoneline acting as a 'front door' for a wider range of government services.

Stakeholders noted the phoneline lacks a clear brand or identity. For example, the phoneline number is placed on three different GOV.UK webpages and described as either "Find Ways to Save Energy in Your Home", "Great British Insulation Scheme helpline" or "Home Upgrade Grant helpline". This reflects the objective of using the phoneline to provide assisted digital support for the GOV.UK webpages above.

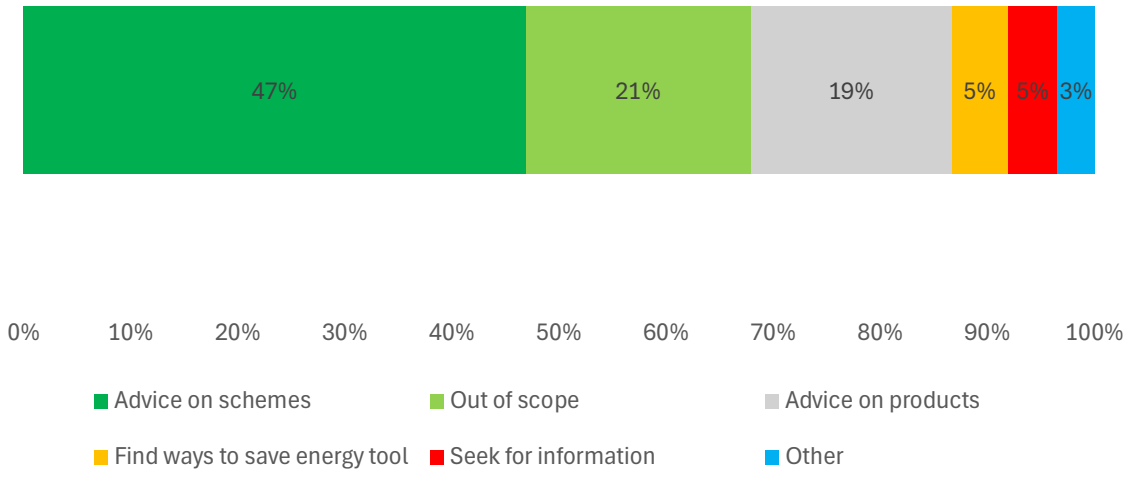
Evidence suggests the phoneline has not been promoted as effectively as it could have been. Wider promotion activity has not taken place, owing to concerns over large spikes in call demand, associated service capacity, and impacts on call response times.

[15] Contact centre lot within Crown Commercial Services Framework RM6181

2.4.1.3 Call reasons and call outcomes

From phoneline data covering the advice period April 2023 to March 2025, call reasons[16] recorded by advisors were dominated by advice on government schemes, out of scope calls, and advice on energy efficiency and low carbon heat products.

Figure 1: Reasons for calling the phoneline between April 2023 to March 2025



Source: DESNZ monitoring data

Call reasons associated with the *Find Ways to Save Energy* (FWTSE) tool accounted for 5% of all calls.

Stakeholder research revealed that calls seeking advice on specific energy efficiency, renewable and low carbon heat measures were not common. Among these, the most common enquiries were about solar PV, windows and insulation.

Stakeholder interviews and discussion with ResQ advisors in March and April 2024 revealed that most incoming calls focused on a variety of government financial support, including the Warm Homes Discount (which is out of scope for the service).

Responses to the phoneline user survey are broadly consistent with these findings. Most survey respondents cited information on government schemes (68%), and help checking eligibility (52%) as primary reasons for their call. Only 7% wanted help with the *Find Ways to Save Energy* tool. During the call, advisors helped respondents to check their eligibility (44%), gave information on government schemes (39%), and sign-posted to other services (38%)—primarily energy suppliers. 16% of respondents were given advice on energy efficiency measures.

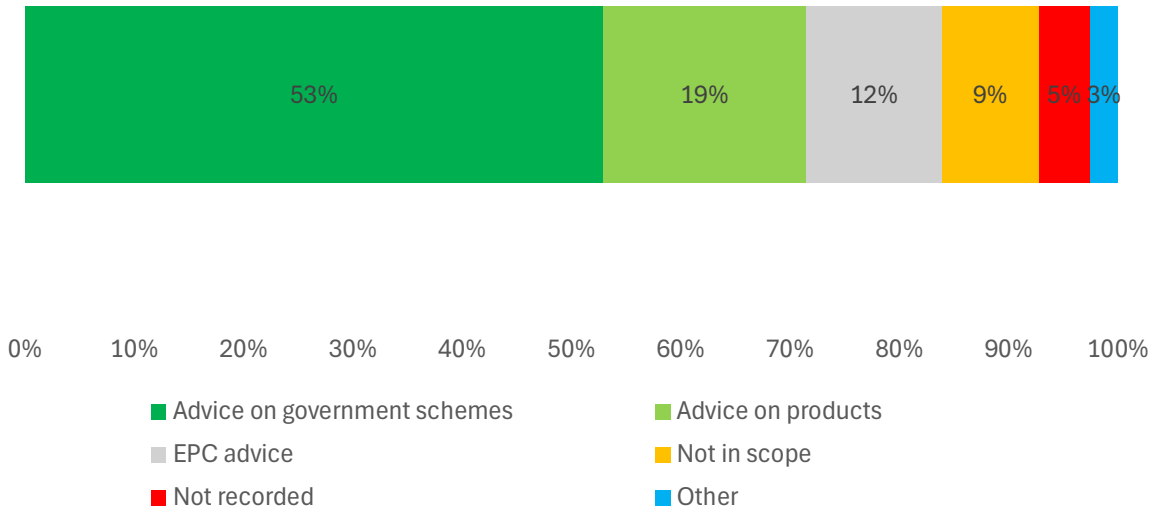
[16] Individual call descriptors were combined - “Seeking scheme advice” and “Advice on schemes” into “Advice on schemes”. “Other” is combined “Feedback/reporting problems”, “Other”, “Landlord exemption”, “Advice on saving energy”. “Digital Assistance” and “Advice on questionnaire” combined into “Find ways to save energy tool”.

ResQ advisors reported low customer awareness of the *Find Ways to Save Energy* tool, with few calls driven by issues using or completing it. In cases where advisors had completed assessments with customers, they suggested callers preferred speaking to someone in person rather than going through the content of the action plan. In addition, advisors also used outputs from the GOV.UK site *Find an Energy Certificate* (EPC summary) as complimentary/additional information alongside the action plan.

Using phoneline data covering the advice period April 2023 to March 2025, call outcomes (Figure 2 below) recorded by advisors[17] were dominated by advice on government schemes, advice on products, advice on EPCs and calls not in scope, which is broadly consistent with incoming call reasons in Figure 3 above.[18] Completion of government scheme eligibility checks, use of the FWTSE tool during the call and landlords' exemptions were rare call outcomes.

Comparing call reasons and outcomes, the proportion of out-of-scope call instances reduces from 21% of call reasons, to 9% of call outcomes, suggesting that advisors were effective in turning incoming out of scope calls into in-scope calls (see section 2.4.1.4 below). Call outcome is not recorded for 5% of calls, which limits interpretation.[19]

Figure 4: Call outcomes for the phoneline between April 2023 and March 2025



Source: *DESNZ monitoring data*

[17] In the calls dataset a unique call instance can have multiple call outcomes logged against it, the %'s in Figure 2 are based on the number of times a call outcome is logged. In Figure 2 rarely occurring descriptors "Landlord exemption", "Used the FWTSE tool" and "Scheme eligibility checks" have been combined into "Other".
[18] The descriptors used for call reasons and outcomes are not wholly consistent, for example advice on EPC's is only recorded for call outcomes, possibly reflecting that customers do not know in advance of calling that they need help with accessing/producing an EPC.
[19] The call outcome "Not In Scope - No change to call reason" is presumably used where an advisor is unable to convert an out-of-scope call reason to an outcome that is in-scope.

2.4.1.4 Call handling

Where the initial call enquiry topic was out of scope, advisors reported attempting to provide in-scope advice (e.g. information on government schemes or measures). Pre-recorded messages were also used to try and re-direct out of scope call reasons. ResQ advisors suggested callers often wanted to speak to someone in person regardless of the nature of enquiry.

Advisors reported receiving regular queries about installers. ResQ are restricted on what information can be provided by advisors, which focuses on signposting to MCS for queries on renewable energy and low carbon heat measures and Trustmark for help finding retrofit professionals.

2.4.2 What has been achieved?

2.4.2.1 Call volumes and customers advised

Between 1st April 2023 and March 31st, 2025, the service handled 16,184 calls in total, of which 12,676 were in-scope.[20] This equates to an average of 674 calls each month, of which an average of 528 were in-scope calls. During the same period, the service advised 16,177 customers in total, of which 12,670 customers were advised on in-scope topics.

The service handled on average 25 calls each day[21] which reflects promotion of the service focused on government websites, Citizens Advice, DWP and energy supplier letters (see Section 2.4.1.2).

2.4.2.2 Who has been reached?

As mentioned in 2.3.1, the assessment of who has been reached by the phoneline relies heavily on the survey of consumers who opted into both being contacted by and taking part in the survey (as demographic information is not captured by ResQ). As such, the sample was non-random and may not be fully representative of all callers. Nevertheless, the survey results can be viewed as indicative, and the key characteristics of the survey population are summarised in Table 2 below.

Household composition

The majority (66%) of phoneline customers were from 1- or 2-person households. 25% of households had children (compared to 29% nationally).[22]

23% of residents from households interviewed were aged over 65, compared to 19% of residents nationally.[23] Older people are more likely to be at risk of cold-related health issues,

[20] Count of all calls with call reasons assigned minus those recorded as “Not in scope”. Advisors would attempt to translate out of scope enquiries into in-scope calls. There is some quantitative evidence this took place (Sections 2.4.1.3 - 2.4.1.4), although 5% of calls lacked a call outcome which limits interpretation.
[21] The calculation for the average number of calls per day allows for the service being closed on public holidays, Sundays and open 9am-12pm on Saturday.
[22] Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024. Labour Force Survey. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2023
[23] [23] Nomis - Bulk Data Export - Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age

which suggests that the phoneline is reaching this group who may benefit more from energy advice and support.

40% of households had at least one person of working age who was unemployed.[24]

Ethnicity

Most respondents (77%) were of White ethnicity, though this was significantly lower than the England average (86%). Based on survey respondents, Asian / Asian British households were overrepresented among phoneline users (11% of respondents, compared to the England population average of 7%).[25]

Disability

25% of residents from the households interviewed[26] have a long-term disability or health condition which interferes with their day-to-day life (compared to 18% of residents in England and Wales).

Table 3: Comparison of survey respondents hard-to-reach characteristics compared to averages in England

Factor	Survey respondents	UK national average
Household income[27]	57% below £30k (base =200)	Median £34.5k
Percentage of household residents who are disabled[28]	25% (base =349)	18%
Percentage of household residents over the age of 65	23% (base =362)	19%[29]
Children under 16[30]	25% (base =363)	29%
Percentage of households in receipt of benefits	51% (base =347)	n/a
Pre-payment meter	7% (base =373)	Unknown – estimated 4 million households (~14%)[31]

[24] Calculated by subtracting number of people in employment, children, and over-65s from total household number
[25] Nomis - Ethnic group by household reference person
[26] 20% of respondents did not answer this question
[27] Average household income, UK - Office for National Statistics
[28] Disability, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
[29] Nomis - Bulk Data Export - Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age
[30] The survey asked for number in household, rather than the status of the respondent, and so is not directly comparable to UK average
[31] How do prepayment meters work and what are the risks around them? | UK News | Sky News

Factor	Survey respondents	UK national average
Ethnicity of survey respondent / household reference person[32]	77% White 23% from an ethnic minority background, including: -11% Asian, Asian British -5% Black -4% Mixed -3% Other (base =341)	86% White 14% from an ethnic minority background including: -7% Asian -4% African, Caribbean, Black -2% Mixed -2% Other

Income and benefits

Of those who were willing and able to divulge this information, 57% of respondents had household annual incomes of less than £30,000. [33] Given the median UK household income is £34,500,[34] this suggests the phoneline is reaching households with low to average incomes.

51% of respondents (who were willing to divulge this information[35]) reported being on benefits.

The evidence suggests that the phoneline is reaching consumers who may be more at risk of fuel poverty. Additionally, given that one of the focuses of the phoneline is to support people with applications to government schemes (many of which have eligibility criteria related to being low income or in receipt of benefits). Taken together, this evidence suggests that the phoneline is reaching its target audience.

Property tenure

95% of respondents owned their own property, with 4% being private tenants and 1% social tenants. Additionally, 6% of respondents were landlords.

Property type

Most respondents lived in semi-detached (30%), terraced (28%) or detached (24%) houses, with 12% living in flats. Where respondents were aware, 52% of properties were built from 1940s onwards; with 48% being pre-1900 to 1939. These properties are likely to be harder-to-decarbonise than modern properties, given the prevalence of solid walls.

11% of properties were listed buildings or in a conservation area, making these likely to be harder-to-decarbonise.

75% of respondents reported that their households had mains gas as their central heating main fuel type, with 14% using electricity, 7% oil and 4% other.

[32] Nomis - Ethnic group by household reference person
[33] 31% of respondents did not answer this question
[34] Average household income, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
[35] 16% of respondents did not answer this question

2.4.2.3 To what extent has the service been effective in engaging hard-to-reach consumers and hard-to-decarbonise homes?

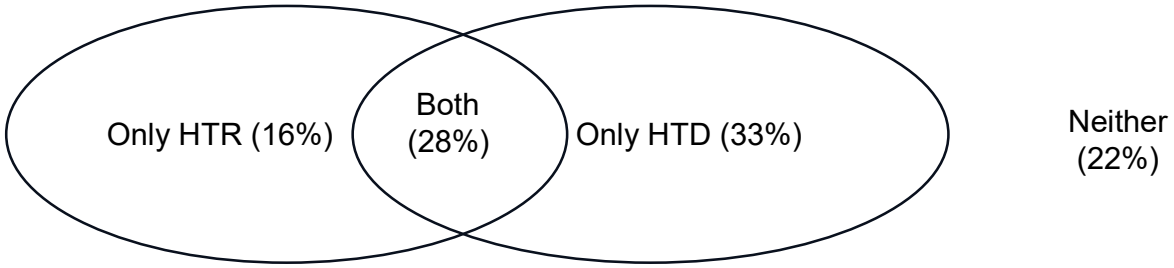
We have used survey responses to calculate the proportion of households classified as hard-to-reach and/or hard-to-decarbonise. Hard-to-reach consumers are those deemed more difficult to provide with energy efficiency and clean heating advice, whether for social, economic, cultural, or geographical reasons. Hard-to-decarbonise homes are homes that are more difficult to retrofit with energy efficiency and clean heating measures because of their age, construction type, location, heritage value, or existing standard of insulation.

For the purposes of the evaluation, we used the following indicators to establish whether customers might be hard-to-reach and hard-to-decarbonise:

Hard-to-reach indicators (one or more of the following)	Hard-to-decarbonise indicators (one or more of the following)
• At least 2 living in household and household income under £30,000 OR a single member household with income under £20,000 • More than one resident with a disability • No access to the internet • No household member under 65 in full employment	• Listed building or in a conservation area • Terraced property or flat • Built pre-war • Off gas grid

This classification is broad, following definitions outlined in policy prior to programme launch. Under these criteria, 50% of respondents could be classified as hard-to-reach, and 55% living in hard-to-decarbonise properties (non-mutually exclusive). 28% were both hard-to-reach and living in a hard-to-decarbonise property, and 22% of respondents were neither (see Figure 5).[36]

Figure 5: Venn diagram showing incidence of hard-to-reach (HTR) and hard-to-decarbonise (HTD) (base=419)

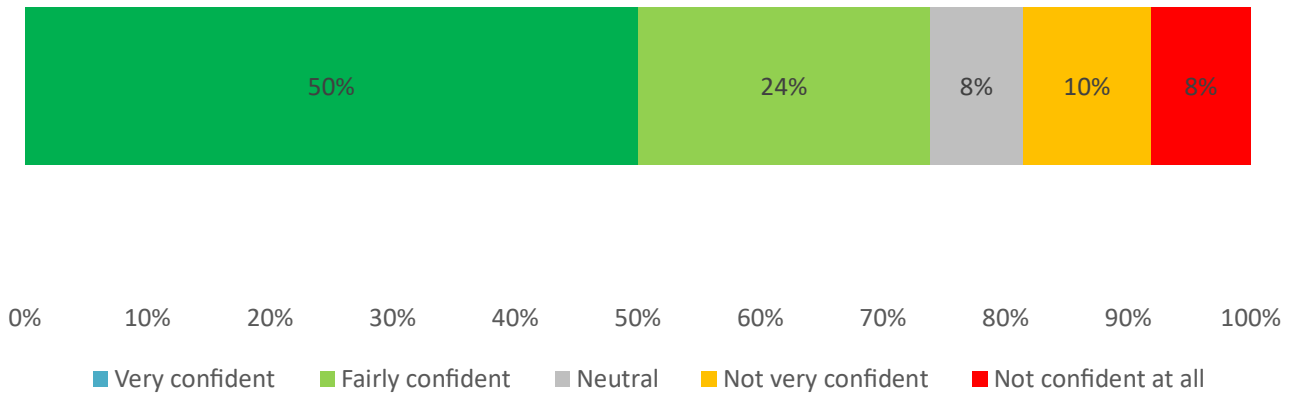


[36] Using a broader definition of hard-to-reach, which included: presence of any person in the household with a disability, any person over 65, use of pre-payment meter, and income below £30k regardless of number of household residents, 79% of respondents would have been classified as hard-to-reach.

2.4.2.4 Digital exclusion and previous use of energy advice

The phoneline aimed to reach customers who might struggle with accessing digital advice or face digital exclusion. Survey evidence (Wave 2 only[37]) showed that 83% of respondents had access to the internet at home, compared to 96% of households across Great Britain, showing that the phoneline was reaching a higher proportion of digitally excluded individuals than average, although most callers were still digitally enabled. 74% of respondents who had access to the internet reported that they were "very" or "fairly" confident using the internet, with 18% reporting that they were not very, or not at all confident.

Figure 6: Confidence in internet use



Survey question: *"How confident do you feel using the internet?"*

Evidence from the qualitative research supported this, with most respondents reporting that they had moderate digital skills but preferred using the telephone or considered it their "default" option. In terms of previous use of energy advice, 42% of respondents first found the phoneline through an online search, and 56% had previously sought energy efficiency advice, with 64% of these doing so online.[38]

Overall, 50% of respondents reported having used tools on the government webpage (*Find Ways to Save Energy*, online eligibility checkers and online applications for funding schemes) at some point before using the phoneline. However, some respondents were uncertain about which tools they had used (with some reporting non-existent tools), so this may be an overestimate. Nevertheless, respondents generally found the tools easy to use, with only 4% reporting difficulty with the GBIS checker (base = 52) and 10% with FWTSE (base = 72). Few participants in the qualitative interviews reported using the tools beforehand, but those who did found them straightforward. These participants typically called the phoneline to follow-up on online submissions or because they preferred speaking with someone directly.

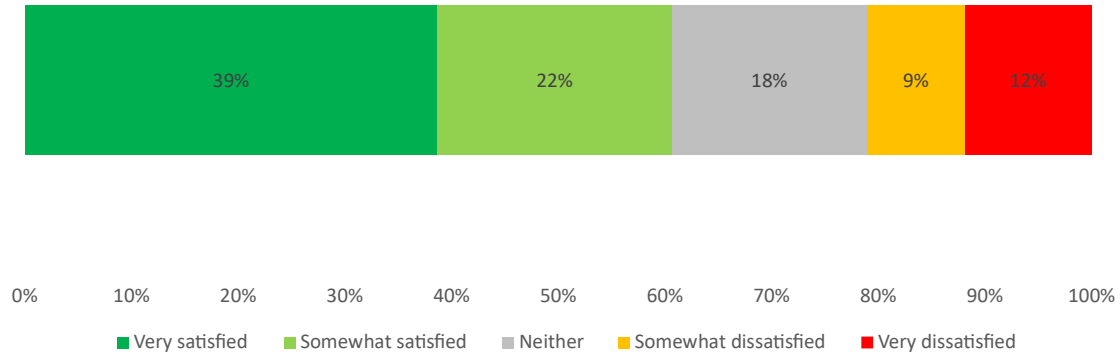
[37] This question was added to the Wave 2 survey, after discussion of interim findings found it a helpful addition
[38] Survey question: "Prior to calling the phoneline, had you ever sought information about energy efficiency measures?"

2.4.3 What are customers' experiences of using the phoneline service?

2.4.3.1 How satisfied were service users with the advice they received?

Levels of customer satisfaction with the phoneline were directly influenced by their post-advice experience. Overall, 61% of survey respondents reported being satisfied with the phoneline. This is lower than the 95% satisfaction rate recorded by ResQ immediately after advice calls, through their automated satisfaction questionnaires.

Figure 7: Overall satisfaction with the phoneline service (survey data, base = 437)



Survey question: *How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service provided overall?*

In the second wave of qualitative interviews, we explored why there may be a drop in satisfaction between the initial phoneline experience, and the survey. Post-call experiences somewhat influenced phoneline perception – both positively and negatively. Where respondents' experiences had been consistent with what the phoneline had advised, this tended to reflect well on the phoneline; whilst poor experiences sometimes reflected badly on the phoneline, particularly where respondents felt they had been misinformed.

Post-call experiences are generally beyond the phoneline's control. Though interviewees usually understood the limited ability of the advice service to influence subsequent outcomes, survey respondents often cited a lack of progress after advice as the reason for their dissatisfaction.[39] Despite outcomes such as eligibility for schemes or availability of installers/measures being beyond the phoneline's control, some respondents noted that advisors should be better informed as to which schemes are available in which areas, and which services were covered, to avoid future disappointment.

> *"Initially I was quite satisfied, because the advisor contacted the local council on my behalf. But as the months go by and I haven't heard anything from the council, I would give it about a two out of five rating"*
>
> (Phoneline customer, quantitative survey)

[39] Primary reasons for dissatisfaction were lack of progress since the call (reported by 28% of dissatisfied respondents, base = 88), not getting the help they needed (27%) and ineligibility for schemes (14%).

> *"The GBIS website said that I could get funding, but after the applications made on my behalf, we found out that the suppliers we discussed did not provide the services promised. The advisor did not know this."*
>
> (Phoneline customer, quantitative survey)

Survey data also suggests that post-call experiences influence perception of the phoneline service. 57% of those who were still awaiting confirmation of eligibility and 57% of those awaiting further information from assessments reported being satisfied—relatively lower than those who had decided to progress (65% satisfied)—though this was not statistically significant.

Did consumers find the phoneline useful?

Survey findings show mixed views on the phoneline's usefulness:

- 56% agreed that the service addressed their needs, and 30% disagreed. Qualitative respondents also had mixed views on the usefulness of the service.
- 76% of respondents found the advice trustworthy.
- 69% found the advice clear and easy to understand, consistent with qualitative feedback. However, some respondents reported a lack of clarity about eligibility for schemes, and discrepancies between phoneline advice and information they found out later.
- 64% of respondents agreed that it was clear what their next steps were. This was also reflected in the qualitative interviews, where perceptions were mixed. Some respondents found themselves at a "dead end" if they found they were ineligible for schemes.

Phoneline advisors were highly commended for their friendly, patient and professional manner and good levels of knowledge, even where outcomes had not been satisfactory.

Did consumers find the phoneline easy to use?

Respondents in the qualitative interviews generally found the phoneline easy to use. One interviewee said it was "*one of the better customer experiences I've had with an automated phoneline*". Respondents in both the qualitative interviews and survey generally noted the short wait-times and that the questions asked by the advisor were easy to follow and understand.

Suggested improvements

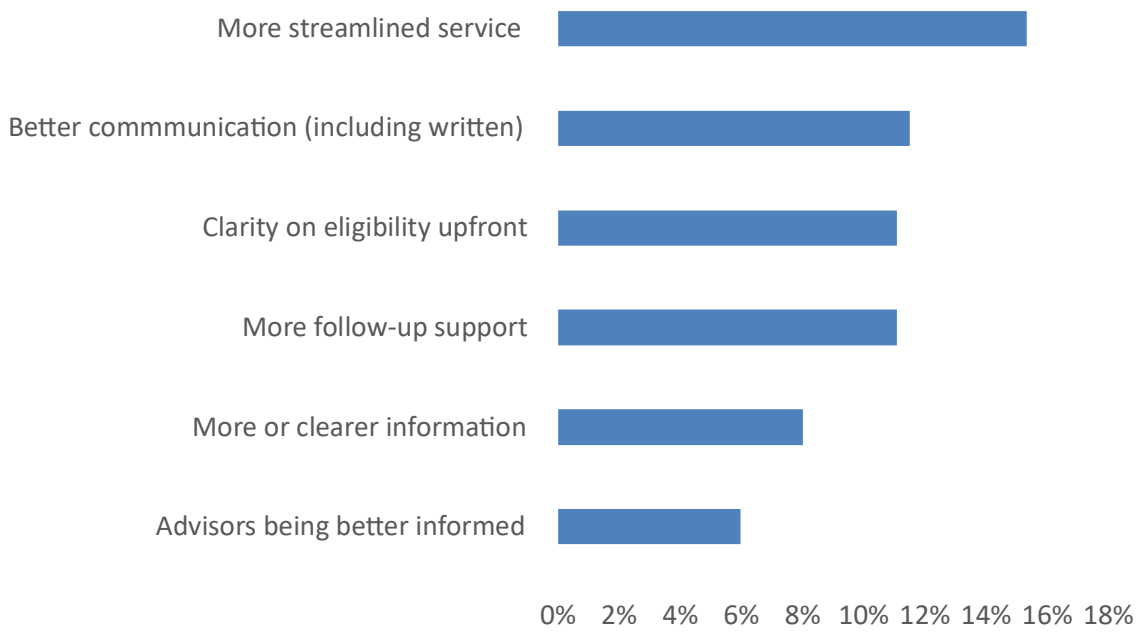
Survey respondents and interviewees were asked whether any improvements could be made to the phoneline. Respondents primarily suggested that the whole service (phoneline and subsequent interaction with energy suppliers and schemes) should be more streamlined and joined up and that more follow-up support should be offered (see Figure 6 overleaf). Respondents also felt that being able to understand their eligibility during the call would save a lot of subsequent effort. Respondents also noted that the advisors should be better informed about what energy suppliers/LAs would be able to offer.

"I think they should centralise it. There's too many companies to go through; it felt like too much work calling all the different referrals, some of whom didn't even understand why you had been given their number."

"The phoneline service should know what the suppliers offer. We were signposted to suppliers that don't do what we wanted."

(Phoneline customer qualitative interviews)

Figure 8: Suggested improvements (base = 235)



Some respondents felt that advice could be better communicated, and that the information shared could be clearer. A few respondents mentioned language barrier issues, and that the phoneline advice could be more tailored to those with disabilities or vulnerabilities. In particular, some respondents felt that the advice could have been delivered slower, to aid understanding (especially for elderly customers) or followed up with a written summary.

"*They could probably take more time in trying to explain things. They say things really quickly and then that's it*"

(Phoneline customer, survey open response)

"*The only thing I would say is that they sometimes struggled to communicate with me as my English isn't so strong so something to address that*"

(Phoneline customer, survey open response)

2.4.4 What are the impacts of the service?

2.4.4.1 How has the phoneline encouraged customers to act?

Following the phoneline call, 40% of survey respondents contacted their energy supplier about financial support; 46% looked for more information from other sources; and 44% completed an eligibility check for a government funding scheme (with 30% applying to one).

In terms of installations, following the phoneline interaction, 110 respondents (25%) had decided to install an energy efficiency measure, with 60% of these having completed an installation by the time of the survey (a total of 15% having installed a measure). 74% of respondents who went on to install one measure or more (base = 53) stated that at least one of them was funded by government schemes.[40]

28% of respondents had decided against installing measures altogether, while the remainder (47%) were still undecided or waiting for eligibility confirmation or energy supplier assessments before deciding. The primary reasons cited by those who did not install measures (base = 122) were the high cost of installation (30%), ineligibility for funding (24%), the measure being already done or not needed (22%) (e.g. the existing insulation was deemed suitable following an assessment as shown in Table 3 overleaf. Some respondents found, following assessment, that there were no suitable measures available through the schemes for their circumstances. Some respondents found the process too much effort, or stress, and had given up, and there were a minority who reported lack of confidence in the measure.

Table 4: Reasons for not installing measures

Reason for not installing	N	%
Cost	36	30%
Not eligible for funding	29	24%
Already done or not needed	24	22%
Moving house	9	7%
No suitable measures	8	7%
Too much effort	5	4%
Not confident in measure	3	2%
Not their decision	3	2%
Scheme was not available	3	2%
Didn’t have enough information	3	2%
Didn't hear back from supplier	2	2%

[40] This question was not asked to all participants who installed a measure due to an error in survey routing which was resolved mid-way through the W1 survey.

2.4.4.2 What difference did the phoneline make to customers?

In the wave 2 survey[41] and qualitative interviews, we asked participants what the role of the phoneline was in their decision-making. Across both, most respondents stated that they already had an idea of what they wanted to do, but the phoneline validated these decisions. However, there were some respondents who would not have acted without the phoneline, for which it provided a vital service.

> "*What the lady said to me gave me more encouragement to go ahead with it. Reassured me on my doubt and pointed me in the right direction.*"
>
> *"I wouldn't have thought about doing loft insulation otherwise"*
>
> (Phoneline customers, qualitative interviews)

67% of respondents who had installed (or planned to install) measures (base = 110) believed they would still have proceeded with an installation without the phoneline. 25% did not.

In summary, while the phoneline played a facilitative role for most customers, it provided essential support for a specific group who may not have sought assistance otherwise, highlighting its value in making energy efficiency resources more accessible.

2.4.4.3 Other factors influencing installation decisions

Besides the phoneline, survey respondents who had installed or decided to install measures (base = 110) were also influenced by suggestions from tradespeople or installers (44%), often during other work. Other influences included advice from energy suppliers (35%), and government financial support (34%). Advice from friends and family, personal knowledge and online research were also commonly mentioned as influencing factors.

Qualitative interviews identified various drivers for engaging with the service, including needing emergency help (e.g. with boiler breakdowns). For those seeking advice on insulation, key drivers were wanting to improve home comfort, reduce noise and damp, reduce energy bills, and be more environmentally friendly.

2.4.5 How effective is the phoneline?

2.4.5.1 Was the service effective at providing consumers with information and guidance around home energy efficiency measures?

Understanding and awareness of measures

Evidence from the phoneline survey suggests a modest increase in understanding around home energy efficiency measures. Although most survey respondents reported no change in their understanding of the most suitable measures for their property, the costs and benefits of

[41] This question was added after reviewing interim conclusions

energy efficiency measures and the steps needed for installation, around one third of respondents reported improved understanding in these areas, as shown in Table 6 below.

Participants in the qualitative research generally felt that their understanding around the logistics of installations had increased following their phoneline call, although their knowledge levels around the measures themselves had remained stable due to being high to begin with.

> "*I knew it was a good idea to get insulation but didn't know the practicalities of what to do or who to go to for it*"
>
> (Phoneline customer, qualitative interviews)

Confidence in measures and schemes

Survey responses showed that the phoneline was not particularly effective in increasing customer confidence in various aspects of the retrofit/energy efficiency process, as shown in Table 4.

Table 5: Changes in understanding and confidence following phoneline advice (base =437)

	Unchanged	Increased	Decreased	Net
Understanding of the most suitable energy efficiency measures for your property	66%	29%	5%	+24%
Understanding of the steps that need to be taken to install these energy efficiency measures	58%	32%	10%	+23%
Understanding of the costs and benefits of these energy efficiency measures	64%	29%	8%	+21%
Confidence in energy efficiency measures saving you more money than they cost	59%	24%	16%	+8%
Understanding of the availability of installers of energy efficiency measures in your local area	65%	21%	15%	+6%
Confidence in energy efficiency measures sufficiently warming up your home	54%	26%	20%	+6%
Confidence in energy efficiency measures not having any serious defects	69%	17%	14%	+3%
Confidence in the local installers of energy efficiency measures	63%	14%	23%	-9%
Confidence in [government] schemes meeting your own household's needs	45%	20%	35%	-14%

Survey question: As a result of the service that you received from the phoneline, has your understanding of/confidence in [variable] increased, decreased or stayed the same?

As with “Understanding”, most measures of confidence remained the same after the phoneline call, although a notable proportion of respondents also reported decreased confidence in energy efficiency measures in terms of cost, and warming up the home, after the phoneline call. There is a weak, positive relationship between understanding of the most suitable measures and confidence in the measures warming up the home (0.37) and not having any defects (0.35), suggesting that increasing consumer knowledge around energy efficiency measures, may contribute to increasing their confidence in them.

The high proportion of “stayed the same” responses was reflected in the qualitative research, with most respondents stating that their confidence had remained stable. Increases in confidence occurred where the phoneline validated their existing knowledge, or where the phoneline’s advice had been corroborated by suppliers, installers or them having positive experiences with the measure. On the other side, negative experiences with measures understandably led to a decrease in confidence in measures.

> *“[My confidence] increased, because of the advice they gave me, and then in practice it works well”*
>
> (Phoneline customer, qualitative interviews)

Confidence in government schemes meeting households’ needs, and confidence applying to government schemes after using the phoneline were both notably low, as shown in Table 5 and Table 6. Qualitative research suggests that, amongst those who went on to apply for schemes, this decline was largely related to respondents’ experiences applying, and their eligibility. Respondents who had previously felt confident applying to government schemes, and subsequently were not eligible, or found the schemes not available, reported a decrease in confidence.

Survey respondents who did not subsequently go on to apply to schemes (base = 246), however, also reported decreased confidence in applying for schemes (-21% net change) and confidence in schemes meeting their needs (-33% net change), suggesting that confidence also decreased as a result of their phoneline call rather than subsequent experiences with applications.

Respondents who stated that the advisor helped them check their eligibility for a scheme during the call but did not subsequently apply for a scheme (base = 65), reported a larger decrease in confidence (-24%) than those who did subsequently apply (0% net change, base = 119). This observed decline amongst those who did not go on to apply, could be due to respondents realising during the call that they would not be eligible and thus losing confidence. As one of the aims of the phoneline is to help customers better understand their options, including their eligibility for schemes, a decrease in confidence to apply could reflect the service meeting that aim**.**

> *“Things seem to change year on year. Online it said you could get a grant, but then we'd apply and then they would say, oh, no, that doesn't apply to your area.”*
>
> (Phoneline customer, quantitative survey)

Table 6: Customer confidence in applying to schemes (base =437)

	Equally confident	More confident	Less confident	Net change
Confidence in applying to these schemes	25%	26%	49%	-23%

Survey question: Following your interaction with the Phoneline, are you feeling more, equally or less confident about applying to these schemes?

Overcoming retrofit barriers

Survey respondents who reported that they had previously considered retrofit measures were asked what had stopped them from installing them in the past; and whether the phoneline support had helped to overcome these barriers.

The most reported barrier was affordability (32% of respondents, base = 159). In most cases (78%, base = 51) this barrier remained after using the phoneline, with 15% perceiving affordability as less of a barrier, and only 6% viewing affordability as a greater barrier following the advice.

There was a notable improvement in understanding among respondents who previously felt they lacked sufficient knowledge about energy efficiency measures to make a decision, with 8 out of 19 stating that it had improved, demonstrating that the phoneline has been somewhat successful in helping customers overcome knowledge barriers.

Other barriers, such as a lack of perceived benefit, doubts about cost savings, and concerns about disruption, largely stayed the same following the phoneline interaction. Given that the aim of the phoneline is to help customers to better understand their options, and how disruption could affect them, one would not necessarily expect a reduction in these barriers, but an increase in their understanding, as shown above.

2.4.5.2 What aspects of the service are working well?

The service was staffed by a team of knowledgeable and helpful advisors. During the ResQ site visit, observed calls were handled very professionally and advisors showed a clear determination to help callers. DESNZ have worked with ResQ to adopt practical tools to help callers who struggle to use the internet. For example, an SMS service is used to send government weblinks to customers mobile phones for ease of access.

ResQ have developed an information dashboard within their call management system, containing easy to access/navigate information sources, e.g. weblinks to more technical information on measures, financial support, MCS and relevant guidance documents. This content was agreed with DESNZ to ensure the quality of information provided by advisors.

2.4.5.3 What aspects of the service are working less well?

When asked to describe key challenges when delivering advice, advisors described examples of customer journey “dead ends”, with particular focus on the ECO4 scheme. During observed

calls, advisors asked specific questions relevant to ECO4 (for example, whether callers were in receipt of benefits, private housing, whether insulation or a new boiler was needed, etc.). Where referring customers to an energy supplier to check ECO4 eligibility, advisors described customers returning to the phoneline after being told by the energy supplier that they were unaware of ECO4, that the scheme was closed, or that the customer/improvement type was ineligible under the scheme.[42] ResQ advisors suggested that the advice coming from providers was sometimes contrary to information available about the scheme and that, based on their circumstances, callers should have been eligible.[43]

To date the service has received a significant number of enquires in relation to the Warm Homes Discount (WHD), which the phoneline cannot currently advise on.[44] ResQ advisors suggested that the ability to provide advice on the WHD could improve customers' experience of the phoneline service. The level of WHD calls during winter 2023-24 was the result of a communication error that was rectified.

Overall, the relatively low demand for calls, the number of calls on out-of-scope topics such as the Warm Homes Discount (WHD), and the dominance of calls regarding financial support suggests that advisors' time is not being primarily used to offer advice on energy efficiency measures (e.g. options, costs, benefits, disruption).

The phoneline has relied on promotion via GOV.UK, Citizens Advice websites, DWP and energy supplier letters. Targeted promotion of how the service can advise on energy efficiency, renewable energy and low carbon heat measures might help to re-balance from calls regarding financial support.

2.4.5.4 Barriers and enablers to undertaking retrofit

Respondents to the survey who were undecided about installing energy efficiency measures following contact with the phoneline (base =80) were asked what additional support they might need to encourage them to undertake installations.[45] The results are shown in Table 6 below:

Table 7: Support needed for undecided customers

Support needed	Percentage
Funding	42%
More information	25%
Clarity on eligibility	11%
Having some come and look at the house	11%

[42] Note that some (often smaller) energy suppliers do not hold obligations under the ECO or GBIS schemes, and others may have already met their targets.
[43] Given the complexity of the household demographics and property characteristics requirements, this could be due to advisors not being fully aware of all requirements.
[44] There is a separate government phoneline service for the WHD.
[45] Can you please explain what additional support you might need to make a decision on installing energy efficiency measures at your home?

Support needed	Percentage
Finding installers or getting quotes	6%
Know what is needed but need to take action	6%
Clearer next steps	5%

Additionally, 8% reported support needs which were related to the scheme (such as hoping for eligibility rules to change, or new measures to be included).

Overall, this suggests that customers' access to funding (either through schemes or other routes) is a key enabler for action. Additionally, more detailed, tailored information (including through on-site surveys), accompanied by actionable steps, might help customers make effective use of the advice provided to them by the phoneline.

2.4.5.5 What works well? Elements of an effective phoneline journey

Based on the qualitative data, phoneline users reported being satisfied with the ease of accessing the advice, its clarity and outlined next steps, timely follow-up from the scheme providers and installations completed in a non-disruptive way.

Case Study 1

John, 41, is employed full-time and lives in a 1960s semi. He wanted loft insulation to keep the house warm and reduce bills. He had previously applied to GBIS through a link in the Money Saving Expert newsletter but had not heard anything back, so he found the phoneline through Google to see if they could help. The phoneline advisor guided him through the online application for GBIS. He found the process easy, and the level of detail provided by the advisor was "just right", and he found the phoneline increased his levels of knowledge and confidence in applying. After applying for the scheme, the energy supplier got in touch to confirm he was eligible, and arranged a survey on the house, which identified the need for cavity wall insulation. The installers were tidy and polite. After a few months of living with the new insulation, John was still happy with it and found the house had been warmer over winter. This reinforced his confidence in the measure, the scheme, and the accuracy of the advice given on the phoneline. John said he would not have had the work done without the phoneline, as his previous attempt to apply had not been successful.

2.4.5.6 What works less well? Elements of a less effective phoneline journey

Less effective phoneline journeys (where respondents were left confused or unable to fulfil their retrofit goals) were characterised by conflicting information provided by the phoneline and other organisations (energy suppliers/installers), long waiting times, and uncertainty over next steps and responsibilities. This could be quite unsettling for vulnerable users or those in emergency situations (such as having had a boiler break down).

Instances such as described below in Case Study 2 illustrate that while consumers may have a positive experience with the phoneline itself, their overall perception of the advice service can be dented by negative experiences afterwards; especially if users felt that the phoneline had not accurately managed their expectations (e.g. they had been advised that certain measures were covered by a Government scheme but suppliers said they were not, or that the scheme in questions was not available).

Case Study 2

Jenny, 80, lives with her partner in a 1990s bungalow. She wanted their loft insulation topping up before winter, as it had been done poorly by a previous contractor years ago. She found the phoneline through Google, and she applied to GBIS on the phone with the advisor. At the time she found the phoneline easy to use, and trusted the advisor, however, after not hearing back from her energy supplier regarding her application (despite being told they would get back to her within 4 weeks), she was left feeling frustrated and lost trust in the system, including the phoneline. At the time of the wave 1 interview (May 2024), Jenny was still waiting to hear back from the energy supplier. At the time of the wave 2 interview (Jan 2025), Jenny had applied through another energy supplier and had heard back that they were not doing GBIS in her area. This has led to decreased confidence in government schemes being suitable for her needs. Jenny acknowledged that her frustrations were mainly due to the scheme, rather than the phoneline, but she would still hesitate to recommend it to friends and family as she had not achieved what she wanted.

2.4.6 Does the phoneline represent value for money?

2.4.6.1 Introduction

The economic evaluation assesses the degree to which the phoneline represents value for money, using a ‘four E’s’ framework,[46] and drawing on the available primary and secondary data.[47] The limitations with monitoring data, customer research and other evidence to support value for money evaluation are detailed in Section 2.3.1. All costs below are exclusive of value added tax (VAT).

The scoping phase did not identify a suitable comparator government service to compare phoneline inputs, outputs and outcomes. DESNZ did not forecast outputs or outcomes, so the evaluation focuses on actual inputs, outputs and outcomes.

[46] Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity, see Oxford Policy Management (2018) – Approach to assessing value for money for further details.
[47] A summary of the available evidence is provided in Section 2.3. The technical annex provides further details of evidence sources.

2.4.6.2 Economy

This section examines whether delivery costs were minimised while maintaining appropriate quality.[48]

Forecast and actual costs

DESNZ forecast that costs would be determined by the volume of incoming calls and the contract spend would not exceed £400k per annum. The actual two-year total costs were £781,229.[49] The service has been delivered just below the anticipated maximum two-year contract value.

Approaches to manage costs

Section 2.4.1.2 highlights that wider promotion of the service has not taken place, owing to concerns over large spikes in call demand and associated service capacity. The staff resource applied to the phoneline was envisaged to be flexible so that costs were reduced during periods of lower call demand, using the following approaches:[50]

- The initial baseline number of staff would be agreed during the mobilisation phase before the 'go live' date
- Call handlers would be 100% dedicated to the service at 'go live', but that may change over the life of the contract subject to capacity (and agreement)
- DESNZ and ResQ would work together to agree the required resource requirements using forecast volumes and more recent data (e.g. seasonal events)
- ResQ would finalise resource planning four weeks in advance to ensure sufficient resourcing profile

If the approaches above to manage costs were effective, monthly invoiced costs would be expected to vary according to periods of higher and lower call demand. However, as shown in section 2.4.6.3, the evidence suggests this is not the case.

2.4.6.3 Efficiency

This section assesses the relationship between delivery volumes and cost.

The mean number of calls per month[51] was 674 and the average cost per call was £49. Costs per call fall as call volumes increase. For example, the maximum number of calls per month (1039, January 2025) also has the lowest cost per call (£32), and the minimum number of calls (458, March 2024) has the second highest[52] cost per call (£68). This suggests some

[48] Costs are those associated with the phoneline service contract between DESNZ and ResQ – i.e. excluding DESNSZ admin spend.
[49] The £781,229 includes service start-up costs for March 2023.
[50] Framework Schedule document, Call off schedule 5 (Pricing details) p74
[51] For 24 months from April 2023 to March 2025
[52] The maximum average monthly cost per call was £69 based on 471 calls in April 2024

economies of scale and limited capability for costs to flex with service demand, despite the contractual efforts to enable this outlined above.

Wider promotion of the service has not taken place (Section 2.4.1.2). We suspect there is likely to be unmet latent demand for the service. Whether costs per call would reduce further if call volumes increased in response to increased promotion will be contingent on the commercial terms and management of the service.

Section 2.4.6.2 summarises the cost management approaches that were anticipated to deliver variation in ResQ monthly costs in response to variation in monthly call volumes. Stakeholders suggested it had proved difficult to enforce the provisions in the contract that were originally designed to vary costs in response to call demand. Further evidence would be required (particularly fixed and variable cost breakdowns) to reach an assessment of whether greater cost flexibility to service demand is possible, at this scale or for a service with broader reach and scale.[53]

2.4.6.4 Effectiveness

This section assesses the extent to which objectives have been achieved, the relationship between intended and achieved outcomes and impacts, and how reasonable are the costs required to achieve those outcomes.

Outcome 1: The service provides advice to customers on government support schemes, energy efficiency/low carbon heating measures, and landlords exemptions

The evidence in sections 2.4.4.1 and 2.4.1.4 confirms the service has provided significant levels of advice on government schemes, supporting eligibility checks, applications and in some cases all the way through to funded installations. Customers had mixed views on the usefulness of advice.[54]

From a customer perspective, the service's effectiveness in relation to government financial support is typically judged by what happens after their interaction with the phoneline. Following interaction with the phoneline, confidence in applying to government schemes was reduced. The evidence suggests this might reflect a group of customers who were advised they were ineligible during the call, but also customers who felt the information provided on schemes during the call was incorrect or unclear (Section 2.4.3.1). Further research on customer experiences is required to understand this better.

The service has provided more modest volumes of advice on energy efficiency and low carbon heating products. The strong focus on government financial support is not surprising, particularly given the limited promotion of how the service could help advise on products.

[53] Under the current contract (to March 2026), costs are determined by the number of 'productive hours' logged each week; i.e. how long a call handler is actively waiting for/handling a call.
[54] 56% of survey respondents agreed that the service addressed their needs, and 30% disagreed.

Customers perspectives on the usefulness of advice associated with products is mixed. There was a net increase in understanding of measures, but there was no change in understanding of the suitability of those measures to their specific property.

Only 1% of call outcomes involved landlord exemptions advice. As detailed in Section2.4.6.5, there is insufficient survey data for landlords to report as a separate group.

Overall, the evidence is mixed on the effectiveness of the service in delivering the intended topics.

Outcome 2: Customers are satisfied with their interaction with the service

Between April 2023 to March 2025, 95% of customers rated the service at satisfactory immediately after a call.[55] Overall, 61% of survey respondents reported being satisfied with the phoneline (Section 2.4.3.1) and there were mixed views on the usefulness of advice for both government schemes and products.

The evidence suggests that high levels of customer satisfaction immediately after a call reduced as customers tried to secure financial support and progress improvements. The evidence in Section 2.4.3.1 provides examples of both customer dissatisfaction due to post call experience or the quality of the advice they received during a call. Dissatisfied survey respondents often cited post-call experiences as reasons for dissatisfaction, which is generally beyond the phoneline's control.

Outcome 3: The levels of action taken following advice

Using a count of survey respondents, 25% had decided to install an energy efficiency measure, with 60% of these having completed an installation by the time of the survey (a total of 15% having installed a measure).

Are the costs required to achieve the outcomes reasonable?

The service has reached significant numbers of customers defined as hard-to-reach, delivered advice on the intended topic areas and a clear majority of customers were satisfied with the service by the point of the evaluation survey. Further, 25% of survey respondents had decided to install an energy efficiency measure.

However, the service handled an average of 25 calls each day which reflects promotion of the service focused on government websites, Citizens Advice, DWP and energy supplier letters. Cost and call data suggests approaches to reduce costs during periods of low call volumes have been unsuccessful. Customer perspectives on the usefulness of advice are mixed and impacted by attempting to secure financial support principally through energy suppliers, or the advice provided not being specific to their property circumstances.

[55] DESNZ set ResQ a target that customers score the overall service at satisfactory (6+) for 95% of responses. Customer satisfaction was captured by ResQ on completion of all in-scope calls.

2.4.6.5 Equity

This section assesses the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to. The assessment is heavily reliant on evidence from the survey. Section 2.3.1 describes the potential limitations with survey data.

During service development, DESNZ identified the following target populations:[56]

- Consumers who were digitally excluded and digitally reluctant i.e. those not sufficiently served by the digital tools provided on GOV.UK webpages.
- Consumers unable to navigate the online (gov.uk) content/tools, with call handlers inputting the information into the website on behalf of the customer
- Landlords who required advice on Energy Performance Certificates and/or applying for exemptions from the Private Rented Sector Regulations

The contract with ResQ also sets out who the service should serve:

- Consumers that require energy advice and information services not addressed by the website
- Consumers who choose to use the phoneline over online advice, and consumers that warrant sensitivity to their needs and vulnerabilities
- Consumers that require digital assistance services including those who cannot/will not access the website
- Consumers who have accessed the website but require assistance or further advice, those who need to be taken through the tools and information on the website by a call handler
- Private landlords who require assistance with their energy efficiency regulatory requirements

To what extent was the service available to the target populations?

Evidence from the survey suggests the service was available to the target populations, but there is likely to be a gap in provision for hard-to-reach consumers who would benefit from using the phoneline but are not aware of its existence via GOV.UK, trusted intermediary websites and communications (see 2.4.1.2).

To what extent did the service reach the target populations?

Evidence from the survey (Section 2.4.2.4) suggests the service has reached customers more likely to have no access to the internet at home when compared to the national average. Confidence in using the internet was relatively high. Evidence from both the survey and the qualitative research revealed that the phoneline has served customers who, while not entirely

[56] No quantitative targets were developed.

digitally excluded, prefer speaking to someone directly, or consider the telephone their “default” option.

Survey evidence on previous use of government digital tools is less reliable, as some respondents struggled to accurately recall which tools they had used. ResQ call outcomes data and survey data both suggest that calls involving completion of scheme eligibility checks or the FWTSE tool (“digital assist”) were relatively rare. It’s not clear if this reflects a lack of awareness, customer preference for completing those tools in their own time, or a lack of interest in using these tools amongst the customers who called the phoneline.

The ResQ call data does not identify if the caller was a landlord. Calls associated with landlord exemptions were rare (Section 2.4.1.4). Landlords advised on topics other than landlord exemptions were included in the evaluation customer dataset and 6% of survey respondents were landlords.

Overall, the service reached significant numbers of customers within the target populations. The evaluation identified a likely gap in availability for consumers who may not be aware of the service through the channels detailed above.

2.5 Phoneline conclusions

The final evaluation comprised a combination of evidence from stakeholder interviews, customer research (both qualitative and quantitative) and value-for-money analysis. The service dataset lacked customer demographics, property age, type and EPC rating, which hindered targeted sampling and representativeness checks, and meant relying on customer research when assessing who the service had reached, leading to unknowns about the total population of callers. Additionally, the survey only captured 10% of the population who used the phoneline during the period of interest, and the sample is likely to be subject to self-selection bias and non-response bias. As such, the evidence lacks external validity and cannot be taken to be completely representative of the population of callers. However, the combination of evidence sources and triangulation of evidence leads to strong internal validity of the findings. The value for money analysis lacked forecast costs and outputs and a comparator service which would have helped place actual service costs and outputs in context.

2.5.1 Has the phoneline met its aims and objectives?

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the phoneline was meeting its core objective of providing energy advice for hard-to-reach and digitally excluded consumers. Using variables relating to vulnerability characteristics as proxies, we have concluded that the phoneline is being utilised by individuals who are less wealthy and potentially more at risk of fuel poverty, than the general population, as well as a higher proportion of those who are older, and those who are disabled. In addition, phoneline customers were less likely than the general public to have internet access at home.

Another key aim was to improve participation in government funding schemes. The evidence showed that the majority of calls were made in relation to government schemes, and 30% of

customers reported going on to apply for a scheme following the call. However, there was a net decrease in confidence in applying for schemes. This was found to be in part due to post-call experiences with schemes (which are outside of the phoneline's control), and possibly also in part due to respondents' realising that they would be ineligible for schemes during the call, which may cause them to lose confidence in applying to schemes. Further customer journey research would provide more insight on this topic.

A further aim was to increase awareness, understanding and confidence in energy efficiency measures. Following use of the phoneline, net understanding of energy efficiency measures and their function, costs and benefits, tended to increase, although for the majority of customers, it remained stable. Confidence in measures remained the same following the phoneline call. This shows the phoneline somewhat achieved this aim.

Finally, the phoneline aimed to encourage customers to install energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements. 25% of survey respondents had decided to install measures, and 15% had successfully completed them. The role of the phoneline was largely as an "enabler" to action, rather than the sole impetus, with participants already having thought about what they wanted to do but needing supporting in progressing.

2.5.2 Customer experiences of the phoneline and retrofit journey

Customers' satisfaction with the phoneline service is high, and insight from the qualitative research suggests that their experience with the service is overwhelmingly positive, with advisors highly praised for their friendliness, professionalism and knowledge.

However, the evaluation has also revealed an apparent lack of customer understanding regarding the scope of support the service can offer. For instance, some customers were frustrated by having to contact a government phoneline for financial help with installing measures, only to then be passed to an energy supplier for further advice and an eligibility assessment. In cases where the information provided differed between the phoneline and energy suppliers, customers experienced added confusion and frustration. Customers reported that they would prefer to see a streamlined, joined-up service (ideally with eligibility decided up-front); and highlighted the importance of the advisors having up-to-date knowledge on scheme availability and eligibility criteria to avoid customers being given conflicting information and to help manage their expectations. Improvements in advisor communication were suggested by some respondents, particularly those with additional needs or those who did not speak English as a first language. Some respondents would have liked to receive a written summary of the conversation and their next steps.

2.5.3 Promotion of the phoneline

The inclusion of the phoneline number within GOV.UK, Citizens Advice websites, DWP and energy supplier letters has generated 16,184 calls in total, of which 12,676 were in-scope. There is likely to be a gap in provision for hard-to-reach consumers who would benefit from using the phoneline but are not aware of its existence via GOV.UK, trusted intermediary websites and communications. Some of those consumers may have been reached through more local advice services including LEAD projects, highlighting the value of providing advice

in different ways. Wider promotion of the phoneline has not taken place, owing to concerns over large spikes in call demand, associated service capacity, and impacts on call response times. During the development of the service, the use of call backs was identified and implemented as a way of managing peaks in demand without impacting on KPI call response times.[57]

Although most respondents were seeking help on government schemes, our customer research also found several respondents who were 'able to pay' and wanted advice on measures such as solar panels; and a reasonable proportion of respondents (26%) who went on to self-fund measures despite being ineligible for government support. Greater promotion of the phoneline might support more of these types of customers to embrace home retrofits.

2.5.4 Does the phoneline represent value for money to the public purse?

The service has been delivered just below the maximum two-year contract value. The service handled an average of 25 calls each day which reflects promotion detailed in Section 2.4.1.2. There is some evidence of economies of scale, although ResQ service costs were not significantly reduced during periods of lower call volumes, as originally envisaged by DESNZ.

The evidence on the effectiveness of the service is mixed. There is clear evidence that the intended outcomes are being met. Negative customer perspectives of the service are driven by their experience of trying to secure financial support after their call to the phoneline, particularly relating to lack of progress after the call, not having received the help they needed or expected, and being ineligible for schemes.

The service has reached significant numbers of customers within the target populations. Spikes in call numbers following the inclusion of the phoneline number in WHD letters suggests there is likely to be latent demand for the service. There is a likely gap in service availability for consumers who were not made aware of the service through the promotion detailed in Section 2.4.1.2. Minimising this gap would enhance access to the service and could deliver further economies of scale.

[57] Where during particularly busy periods a caller is asked to leave their number to be called back at a quieter time.

3 Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) programme

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Service aims and rationale for intervention

In March 2023, DESNZ and the Net Zero Hubs released a call for Domestic Local Energy Advice Demonstrator projects. The call for projects ran from 20 March 2023 until 21 April 2023, with awarded funding running from 5th June 2023 until 31st March 2025. The call stated that projects should complement the existing web and phoneline services to help hard-to-reach[58] consumers and consumers living in hard-to-decarbonise[59] homes make energy efficiency changes to their home. It also provided the following guidance about who the advice should support and the steps in the customer journey that should be supported:

> *"It is hoped that in-person approaches to energy advice will provide particular support for vulnerable consumer groups, including the digitally excluded, and for harder-to-treat properties. Successful projects should provide an advice service for consumers for each stage of their retrofit journey, from an initial enquiry about how to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through to the point where installation of retrofit measures takes place. The service will also help consumers to find grant funding and subsidies where available."*

Each of the Net Zero Hubs was allocated £4 million of grant funding, to distribute amongst a mix of smaller and larger projects. The Net Zero Hubs led the assessment and selection process for projects in their respective geographic area, for final sign off from DESNZ. In total, 36 projects were selected, however only 35 projects progressed to the delivery stage.

Delays driven by DESNZ internal business planning, commercial agreements[60] and machinery of government changes meant that in practice, projects started to deliver advice between August 2023 and December 2023.

In-person energy efficiency advice had not been delivered at this scale before. Whilst many of the delivery organisations involved in LEAD had had some involvement with the provision of energy efficiency advice in the past, the majority set out to trial approaches and methods that were new to them and at a scale new to them.

[58] The definition of hard-to-reach has been deliberately loose and open to interpretation from the project outset. It is defined in the initial call for project as *"Less internet-literate, elderly, fuel poor, off gas grid, minority ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, those with disabilities, those sensitive to internal disruption in homes, etc,"*
[59] The call for projects defined this as; *"listed buildings/conservation areas, planning restrictions, non-standard construction, terraced homes, flats, off-gas-grid homes, poorly-performing homes, etc."*
[60] Delays to the signing of grant funding agreements with LEAD projects

There were two main aims of LEAD:

1. To reach consumers who would not normally be reached through the other strands of the CAI programme, and provide them with accessible energy efficiency retrofit advice, increasing their awareness of, and confidence in, installing measures. It was also hoped that the projects would raise awareness of and assist customers with applying for funding schemes, although it is important to note that projects were not directly involved in the process of the government funding schemes and had no control over funding decisions.

2. To test and learn, at a local level, innovative approaches to engaging with and addressing the advice needs of hard-to-reach consumers and consumers living in hard-to-decarbonise homes.

3.1.2 Key Performance Indicators

KPIs were used by DESNZ and Net Zero Hubs to track and monitor project performance. Projects reported the number of customers they had advised each month. There were opportunities for projects to revise their estimates throughout delivery.

Customers advised (KPI 1)

Each project estimated the number of customers that they would advise. For interactions to be counted as a KPI 1, the customer should have received bespoke, tailored advice, delivered in-person. This type of interaction varies widely by project, from a 10-minute conversation at an event to a detailed, one-to-two-hour technical home survey (with some further variations by some projects).

Properties with measures installed (KPI 2)

Projects were asked to collect data on the number of advised customers that went on to install measures. Projects submitted data monthly. The extent to which each project conducted follow up activity with customers to gather this data varied. The projects were advised that the following measures could be included within their KPI 2 reporting:

- Measures improving the energy efficiency of the fabric of the house, such as wall, floor, loft, or roof insulation, draught proofing, and double glazing.

- Energy-efficient lighting or appliances, such as Mechanical Heat Recovery Ventilation, time and temperature zone controls, and water heating controls.

- Low- or zero-carbon heating sources, such as heat pumps.

- Sources of renewable electricity generation, such as solar photovoltaic panels.

3.2 Methodology

The Technical Methods Annex provides details of a programme theory of change, evaluation objectives, associated research questions, and a more detailed description of the methodologies used in the evaluation.

Though some research was conducted at a programme level, including a review of monitoring data and interviews with DESNZ and the Net Zero Hubs, the evaluation focused on a subset of projects which had shared sufficient customer details to enable meaningful primary research.

As such, this evaluation does not make a detailed assessment of the programme, but rather a subset of indicative projects, demonstrating lessons learned for future in-person energy advice provision.

The table below provides a summary of the case study projects to enable a quick overview of how they compare. Further detail is available on gov.uk.[61]

Table 8: Summary of projects selected as part of the case study approach

Project	Summary of project	Funding	Customer profile	Type of advice
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (Basingstoke)	Created a Green Team within the council, targeting older and disabled customers through other organisations.	£197,085	Less hard to reach	Light touch for most customers but some home visits conducted.
Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC)	A group of charities offered advice in group settings, specifically trying to overcome language barriers.	£827,899	Hard to reach	Light touch
CSE and Wiltshire and Swindon Borough Councils (CSE Futureproof)	Retrofit experts provided home visits / surveys.	£589,262	Less hard to reach	In depth

[61] Local Energy Advice Demonstrator Projects: details of organisations awarded funding - GOV.UK

Project	Summary of project	Funding	Customer profile	Type of advice
East Lindsay	Within SE Lincolnshire, used an electric Energy van to visit rural areas, demonstrating measures.	£662,154	Hard to reach	Combination, majority light touch with some home visits.
Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)	A large project with several delivery organisations, testing a range of lighter touch a more in-depth approach.	£1,935,291	Broad range due to scale of project, but less hard to reach.	Majority of customers received light touch advice, but some received home visits.
North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA)	Across Northeast region, aligned to the One Stop Shop for retrofit advice, provided retrofit assessments and trained community leaders in retrofit to support engagement.	£911,716	Broad range	In depth
Plymouth Energy Community (Plymouth)	Skilled advisers delivered home visits / surveys.	£1,388,835	Less hard to reach	In depth
Rossendale Valley Energy (Rossendale)	Used an app to engage customers and to identify where in-depth advice would be more impactful.	£550,400	Hard to reach	In depth
South East London Community Energy (SELCE)	Used two community groups to reach whole neighbourhoods.	£1,187,222	Broad range	Combination
Surrey County Council (Surrey)	Three levels of home visit / survey offered.	£745,100	Less hard to reach	In depth

Project	Summary of project	Funding	Customer profile	Type of advice
Footprint Trust / Testlands Wellbeing Hub (Testlands) (Delivered in Southampton and Isle of Wight)	Offered advice through the community wellbeing hub.	£991,429	Broad range	Combination
West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)	Focused on older customers facing deprivation and / or with a low proficiency in English.	£836,833	Hard to reach	Lighter touch
YES Energy (Delivered in West Yorkshire)	Offered a Net Zero Readiness Assessment.	£280,836	Hard to reach	Lighter touch

From our knowledge of all 35 projects, the key customer profiles and the most frequently used delivery approaches are reflected in the subset of 13 selected projects. However, the subset of projects for the case study approach differed to the 35 projects in total in the following ways:

- They were larger projects by spend; Subset average £713,000, compared to £478,000 average of the 35 projects.
- They advised larger numbers of customers as reported in KPI 1; Subset average 3,587, compared to 2,300 average of the 35 projects.
- They reported larger numbers of customers installing for KPI 2; Subset average 548. compared to 293 average of the 35 projects. However, the conversion rate of customers from KPI 1 (customer advised) to KPI 2 (measure installed) was the same for the subset of projects as for the average of the 35 projects (both 15%).
- They had a lower cost per transaction; Subset average £318 compared to an average of £587 across the 35 projects.

This chapter draws upon the evidence gathered across the interim and final evaluation stages, the sources of which are summarised in the table overleaf.

Table 9: Summary of evidence gathered

Type of research	Summary of approach and evidence gathered
Desk review	Of programme documentation and data including the outline and full business case, the call for competition, project applications, monitoring and project reports of all 35 LEADs.
Telephone survey of customers, representing a relatively small number compared to the total number of customers supported by the end of the programme (80,790)	887 customers supported by 10 LEAD projects conducted in September 2024 and February 2025. The number of interviews completed per LEAD ranged from 59 to 137.
Qualitative interviews with individuals involved in the management and delivery of LEAD	• 4 individuals from DESNZ • 1 individual from each of the Net Zero Hubs • 57 interviews across 14 LEAD projects. Individuals interviewed include project managers and advisers who engage with consumers. The number of interviews conducted per project varied between 1 and 9.
Qualitative interviews with customers of LEAD projects where a telephone survey was not possible[62]	11 interviews with customers across 3 LEAD projects (CSE Futureproof Wiltshire, Testlands and Rossendale).
Ethnographic research with customers	8 customers across two LEAD projects (Rossendale and Plymouth) completed video diary research shortly before and after their interaction with the LEAD. Ethnographic observations for three LEAD projects (BVSC, GMCA and Rossendale), of 4 events and 2 home visits. A small number of interviews were conducted with customers attending the events.

[62] Three of the LEADs selected as case studies for the final evaluation did not provide a sufficient number of customer contact details to conduct a telephone survey that would achieve robust quantitative findings. Instead, a small number of qualitative interviews were conducted with customers.

3.2.1 Strength and limitations of evidence

There are significant limitations to the data analysis which are summarised in the table below. As such, we have avoided drawing programme-level inferences from the quantitative data, but have sought to extract as much analytical value from the flawed data available.

Table 10: Strength of evidence

Evidence on:	Strength of evidence
Outcomes; KPIs	Moderate. Whilst the monitoring data supplied by projects was sense-checked by the NZ Hubs and by DESNZ, there are limitations: • The KPI definitions of 'customers advised' and 'measures installed' were open to interpretation and projects used different approaches. KPI figures are not directly comparable across projects.
Outcomes relating to the customer profile advised, customer understanding and confidence, and decision to install.	Moderate. Findings from the customer survey are limited to: • **The projects selected as part of the case study approach**. • **Those who could recall the advice they received.** For the LEAD survey, given the limited customer dataset, we sampled from all customers for whom we held contact details to ensure we had sufficient power for statistical analysis. Customers advised between October 2023 and June 2024 were surveyed in September 2024. However, this means there is a greater risk of recall bias for this survey. For some projects, this was particularly problematic, as some survey respondents had no recollection of the advice at all. These survey responses were still incorporated in our analysis as we felt it important to that survey estimates reflected where customers' experiences with the project were so trivial they were not memorable. • **A relatively small proportion of customers overall.** We were able to sample from 22% of the total number of customers reported by the case study projects. Projects did not collect contact details for all customers; projects reported that some customers did not want to provide their contact details or were advised in settings that did not support the collection of this data. This means that it is not possible to report reliably on the outcomes

Evidence on:	Strength of evidence
	achieved at the programme level. For some projects, the sample provided is skewed towards customers who received more in-depth support. • **The customers who agreed to participate in an interview.** Customers who had a particularly positive or negative experience may have been more motivated to participate. The customer survey evidence has been used to compare responses from different groups (mainly between projects). **Comparisons in the survey data are only made where statistically significant differences were found**. To strengthen the survey evidence, it has been triangulated with qualitative and ethnographic research with customers, and qualitative evidence from projects.
What was effective in engaging customers and the challenges / barriers affecting effectiveness.	Relatively strong for the projects selected as part of the case study approach, and the themes reported in this report are likely to have been evidenced to some extent across the wider group of LEADs. However: • The findings may not be representative of all projects. • The evidence is also based on the views that LEADs have chosen to share during interviews. The interviews were around one hour in length and therefore had to be focused on the key points / views.
Economic evaluation	Moderate. The assessment draws on monitoring data, survey responses and qualitative evidence across case study projects, using a structured 4 Es framework to enable a proportionate assessment of value for money. However: • The available cost data lacked granularity, limiting the ability to assess economy in detail. • Survey responses may over-represent households receiving more intensive support for some projects, affecting confidence in the representativeness of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness findings.

Evidence on:	Strength of evidence
	• Differences in how projects interpreted and applied KPI1 and KPI2 affect comparability and the assessment of efficiency and effectiveness. • Findings relate to case study projects only and may not be representative of all LEADs.

3.3 What has been achieved?

This section provides a summary of the extent to which the projects achieved target KPIs, hard to reach and hard to decarbonise homes have been reached and the difference made to customers in terms of outcomes. It draws upon the survey and qualitative data to note differences by project or by customer types where appropriate. The subsequent section then provides deeper insight into what was effective in achieving the outcomes, and what worked for whom.

3.3.1 To what extent did projects meet their KPIs?

Projects reported that in total 78,553 customers were provided with personalised energy efficiency advice, which represents 90% of the total number of customers forecast by projects at the start of the programme (87,316 customers). Performance varies by LEAD project. 13 of the 35 LEAD projects met or exceeded their forecast number of customers advised, however the remaining 22 did not. The evidence suggests many projects were overly ambitious in their forecast, estimating outcomes for innovative customer engagement approaches that had not been tested before.

Collectively, projects report that 10,459 customers have installed measures to date. This represents 13% of customers advised. This number is lower than projects had forecast to achieve at the outset. Again, performance across the projects was mixed; only 7 projects met or exceeded their forecast, and the number of installations per project vary widely from 0 to 3,800. There are reasons to believe that the monitoring data collected to date under-reports measure installations undertaken following LEAD advice:

- Tracking KPI2 typically required follow-up with households after advice had been given. Some projects implemented robust systems to do this, while others had limited capacity, resulting in gaps or underreporting.
- The retrofit process, especially for more complex measures, can take several months. As a result, some projects may not yet have captured the full impact of their advice within the evaluation period.
- The customer survey evidence found that 19% (n=887) of respondents had installed a measure, and a further 10% (n=887) had decided to install a measure but had not yet done so. These findings are likely to be at the upper limit due to the likely bias in the sample.

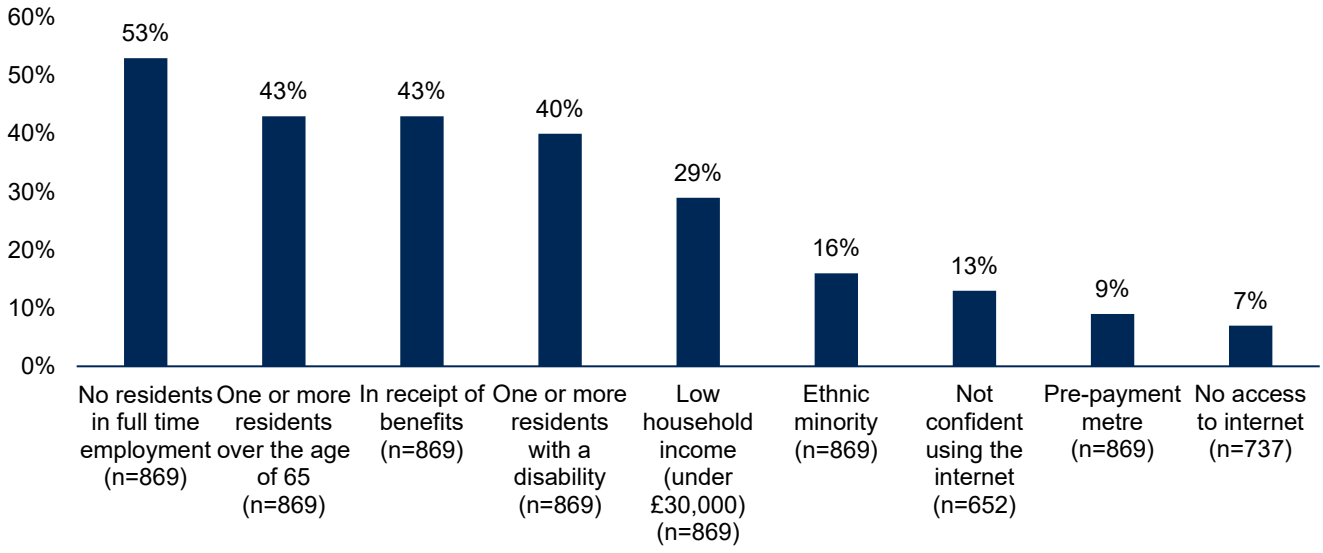
3.3.2 To what extent have hard to reach customers and hard to decarbonise homes been reached?

Based on the broad definitions of hard-to-reach (HTR) and hard-to-decarbonise (HTD) that LEADs were provided with in the call for projects,[63] the evidence suggests that the projects have been successful in generating interest from and engaging both HTR customers and customers living in HTD homes. The evidence also suggests there is a substantial overlap between the two groups.

The customer profile for each project varied, with some projects targeting specific communities, customer or property types (e.g. ethnic minorities, older residents or terraced housing). Some projects served higher proportions of hard-to-reach customers and / or customers facing multiple challenges. These include BVSC, East Lindsey, Rossendale and WYCA. In contrast, the customer profile of other projects such as Basingstoke & Deane and GMCA could be described as less hard-to-reach.

The charts below show the wide range of customers that participated in the survey. Whilst the proportions are unlikely to be representative of all customers served by the projects, it provides an indication of the types of customers and types of hard-to-decarbonise homes that projects engaged with, reflecting the broad definitions set out in the specification.

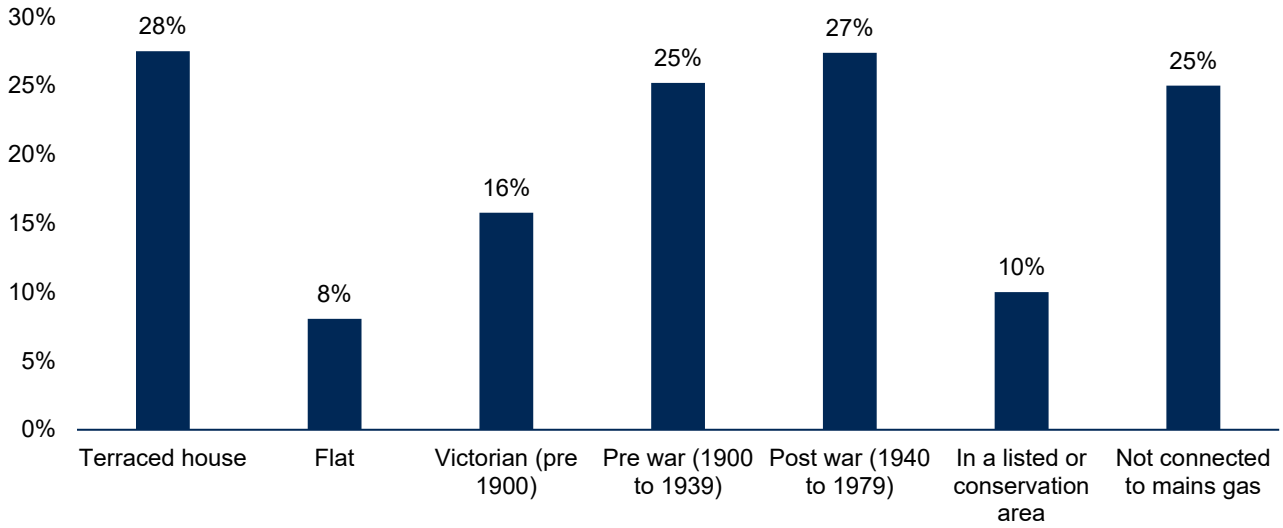
Figure 9: Customer profile by HTR characteristics[64]



[63] The definition of hard-to-reach has been deliberately loose and open to interpretation from the project outset. It is defined in the initial call for projects as *"Less internet-literate, elderly, fuel poor, off gas grid, minority ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, those with disabilities, those sensitive to internal disruption in homes, etc".* The call for projects defined hard-to-decarbonise properties as; *"listed buildings/conservation areas, planning restrictions, non-standard construction, terraced homes, flats, off-gas-grid homes, poorly performing homes, etc".*

[64] There are differences in the bases for the characteristics as new questions / options were added to the survey in wave 2.

Figure 10: Customer profile by HTD characteristics (n = 869)



Collectively, the projects advised customers with varying levels of existing awareness and knowledge of energy efficiency measures:

- Project staff reported engaging customers who had not considered energy efficiency measures beforehand and who faced challenges when accessing other information and advice (e.g. whether the advice could be trusted, finding the information too confusing). This was further evidenced through some customers participating in the qualitative research.
- Some projects (notable examples include CSE Wiltshire, Plymouth and Surrey) advised customers who had considered energy efficiency home upgrades before and were already relatively knowledgeable, examples of which are evident in the qualitative research with customers. These customers tended to be willing and able to pay for energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation upgrades, and included a mixed demographic (e.g. families and older couples with higher household incomes). Due to their existing levels of awareness and understanding about energy efficiency home improvements, the help required by these customers tended to be around understanding the affordability and return on investment of installing measures and finding and selecting trusted suppliers and installers

3.3.3 What support was provided by LEADs?

Each project developed their own unique model of support, although areas of commonality are evident. The type of support offered varied in intensity:

- Lighter touch advice was often provided in a group setting e.g. at an event or with a community group. This type of interaction often included a check for eligibility for funding. Large proportions of customers of the following projects received this type of advice provision; Basingstoke, BVSC, East Linsdey, and GMCA.
- More intensive and personalised advice often included a survey or assessment conducted in the home, some of which used tools such as thermal imaging. Projects

where home visits formed a significant part of their support provision, (i.e. as a proportion of the total number of customers they advised) include CSE Futureproof, Plymouth, North of Tyne and Surrey.

The type of support provided by projects also varies by the number of interactions the customer had with the LEAD, in other words the extent to which the LEAD provides follow up support after providing initial advice, and by whether projects provided a written summary of advice. LEADs have taken different approaches to this.

3.3.4 What difference have the services made to users?

LEAD advice aimed to move customers along the retrofit journey, raising awareness and educating customers about energy efficiency measures, informing customers about funded schemes, and increasing customer understanding about measures and increasing their confidence to install.

The evidence shows that advice provided by the projects has been effective in moving some, but not all customers along the customer journey. They have also been more effective at increasing understanding of what measures are suitable for the customer's home, compared to improving confidence to install, deciding to install and engaging with installers.

The survey data was analysed by a wide range of HTR characteristics (e.g. age, ethnicity, digital capacity etc) to explore whether outcomes different for specific groups of HTR customers. Whilst there were differences found between hard to reach and non-HTR customers, there were limited differences between customers with different hard to reach characteristics. The sections below detail where differences in outcomes (e.g. increases in understanding, confidence etc) were evident between types of customer.

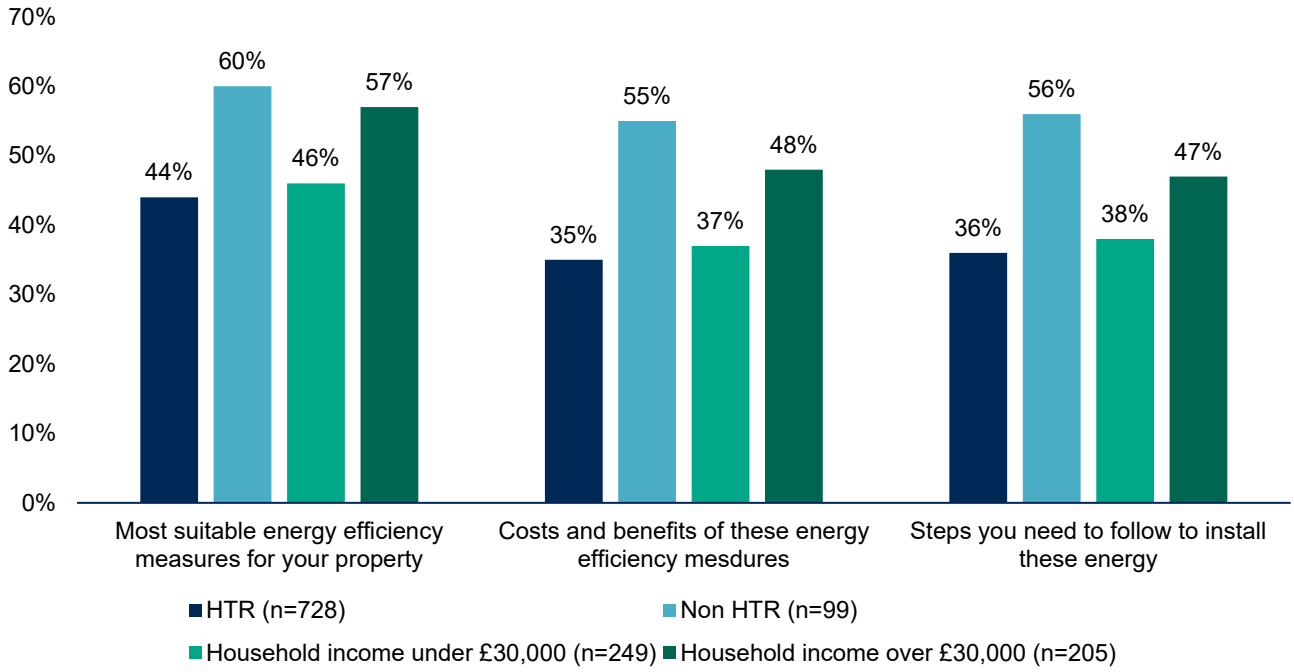
3.3.4.1 Understanding

Higher proportions of customers surveyed report an increase in understanding about the most suitable energy efficiency measures compared to understanding the costs and benefits of measures and the steps needed to install measures. Due to flaws in the survey sample, we have avoided reporting the proportion of all customers that have an increase in understanding. However, the survey evidence suggests differences in increases in customer understanding by customer type and by LEAD project.

Differences by type of customer

Higher proportions of non-HTR customers and customers with a household income of over £30,000 reported an increase in understanding compared to hard-to-reach customers and customers with a household income of under £30,000. The differences are shown in the Figure overleaf.

Figure 11: Has your understanding of the following changed? Split by HTR and non-HTR customers and by household income



The differences in increases in understanding that are evident between hard-to-reach and non-HTR customers could be due to the following factors:

- Customers with a household income of under £30,000 are more likely to have been referred to funded schemes, due to their potential eligibility. The qualitative evidence found that customers were confused by the funding process, which hinders understanding.
- Customers with a household income of over £30,000, (also described as able to pay customers[65]), were reported by projects to be more demanding about the advice they received, and asked more questions, because they were expected to pay for the measures. In turn, the additional information may have helped with their understanding. The survey also found that customers with a household income of over £30,000 were more likely to have sought advice about energy efficiency before (66% compared to 48% of customers with a household income of under £30,000.) This means that these customers were further ahead in their awareness and understanding of measures, potentially making them amenable to further increases in understanding.
- The digital capacity of customers, which could reflect broader levels of literacy and understanding. For example, a higher proportion of customers surveyed who said they were very confident using the internet (54%) reported an increase in understanding of suitable measures for their home compared to customers who are not confident at using the internet at all (24%).

[65] However, it is unlikely that some customers in this group would be able to afford energy efficiency measures, even if they are referred to as 'able to pay'.

Differences by project

Some projects were more successful at increasing customer understanding than others. These are set out in section 3.4.1.

3.3.4.2 Confidence

Collectively, the projects have increased the confidence of some customers, but not all. Whilst it is not possible to reliably report the proportion of all customers with an increase in confidence, the evidence does suggest that the advice has been more successful in increasing customer confidence in measures sufficiently warming up the home than in:

- Measures not having serious defects
- Measures saving more money than they cost
- Navigating the process to install measures

The survey found fewer differences in increased customer confidence by project and / or by customer type, suggesting that projects have been relatively equal in increasing confidence. The exception is that a higher proportion of non-hard-to-reach customers (41%) reported increased confidence in potential bill savings than hard to reach customers (26%). The qualitative evidence found that able to pay customers were more interested in the affordability of measures and their potential return on investment, and more support has been provided in this area.

It is also worth noting that some customers who learned more about the measures, and increased their understanding, became less confident in the measures. This was evident in the qualitative research with customers:

- Customers that had not been convinced of the reliability of measures, or that they would be suitable for their home.
- Customers who had been provided with estimated costs and savings did not think it was worthwhile investing in the measures.
- Customers advised about measures were not confident in finding reputable installers.

3.3.4.3 Awareness of and participation in government schemes

Projects have:

- Raised awareness amongst customers about a range of government funding schemes, namely GBIS, HUG, and ECO.
- Supported customers to check their eligibility.
- Given customers confidence to apply and practical support to complete applications.

The extent to which support was provided to access funding varied by project, as did the way in which projects provided the support.

3.3.4.4 Types of measures customers have decided to install

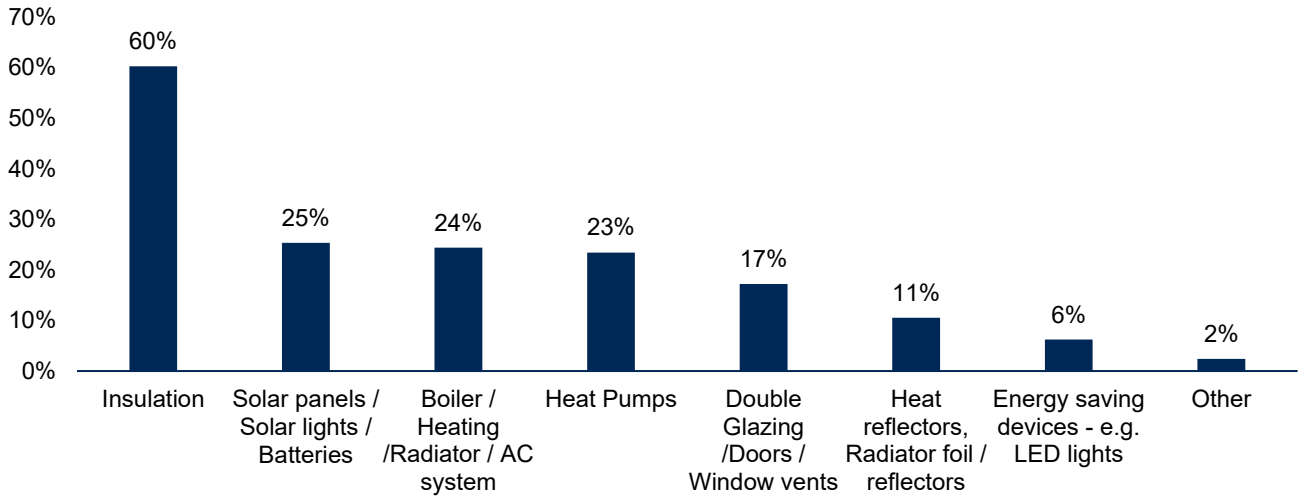
As stated in section 3.3.1 some customers have decided to install one or more measures (from a wide range) in their home following the advice.

Customers surveyed who had made the decision to install were asked what measures they had installed or planned to install. Responses were coded into categories and are shown in Figure 12. These responses are indicative and may not necessarily reflect the distribution across the whole programme, although the types of measures installed were supported by the qualitative evidence.

Insulation was a common choice amongst customers. This predominantly comprises loft and cavity wall insulation, although there were examples of underfloor insulation and insulation on specific areas of the home e.g. a porch or out-house.

Other measures cited by customers surveyed include larger measures such as renewable technologies and heating systems as well as a range of smaller measures such as heat reflectors and draught proofing and energy saving lightbulbs. The qualitative evidence found that some projects provided advice on ‘quick win’ measures to increase thermal comfort and to save customers money on their energy bills. Further, some projects gave customers items such as draught proof tape and energy saving light bulbs for free.

Figure 13: 'What energy efficiency measures have you installed (or are you planning to install)’ (capture verbatim, coded, multiple response) (n=209)



3.4 How effective were the LEAD projects?

The evaluation set out to answer how effective the LEADs were, what project types have been effective, and why. This section summarises the evidence on effectiveness, as well as stakeholder views on the benefits and challenges of local advice delivery.

3.4.1 Assessing the effectiveness of projects

The effectiveness assessment focuses on the extent to which LEAD projects have achieved their intended outcomes, particularly in supporting households to take action to improve energy efficiency or to take meaningful steps toward doing so. This includes not only the installation of measures but also improvements in understanding, confidence, and readiness to act.

Evaluating effectiveness across the programme presents several challenges. What constitutes success varies significantly between projects, shaped by their delivery models, the characteristics of the households they supported, and the complexity of the housing stock they were working with. In addition, the two main sources of data used in this assessment, LEAD monitoring data and the resident survey, have important limitations (described in more detail below). The data allows us to identify which projects performed well on different outcome measures, but it does not provide sufficient detail to determine why. Projects varied in context, delivery model, and target group, and while we highlight possible contributing factors where supported, the evidence is not strong enough to draw firm conclusions about what drove effectiveness.

Given these constraints, the aim is not to rank projects or compare them on a like-for-like basis. Instead, the focus is on identifying projects that appear to have performed particularly well within their specific context. It is important to note, however, that the assessment involves an element of judgement, and the findings should be interpreted with caution, recognising that not all factors influencing performance can be fully accounted for.

Performance against KPI2 (installation of energy efficiency measures)

KPI2 measures the number of households that installed energy efficiency or retrofit measures after receiving advice. This is the main quantitative indicator used to assess the effectiveness of LEAD projects, but its reliability and comparability across projects is limited by several factors (i.e. inconsistent definitions used by projects and variation in customer follow up and timing of installations). These issues mean KPI2 figures should be interpreted with caution.

Table 10 shows the performance of LEAD projects against the following measures:

- Installations as a percentage of original and revised (forecast) targets
- The conversion rate from advice to installations (i.e. KPI1 to KPI2)

Projects with the strongest performance on these metrics include CSE (Futureproof Wiltshire), WYCA, and North of Tyne. Each exceeded their target for installations by a large margin and achieved a conversion rate above 10%. However, all three projects used broad definitions of qualifying measures and had relatively low targets (78, 30, and 283 respectively), making high performance more achievable.

The GMCA project stands out for the volume of installations; 3,376 against a target of 1,592. Interviewees noted these were largely due to a partnership with B&Q, in which customers receiving in-store advice and were given vouchers entitling them to discounts on certain energy

efficiency products.[66] If the voucher is redeemed, this was counted as a KPI2. While clearly effective at driving uptake of energy efficiency measures among consumers already engaged in home improvement, this model differs markedly from others, particularly those targeting harder-to-reach groups.

Several LEAD projects did not meet their KPI2 targets and had a low conversion rate. In most cases, this reflected one or both issues noted above: the use of a narrow definition of eligible measures, and/or limited follow-up with consumers to confirm installations.

In summary, while KPI2 offers a tangible measure of impact, differences in definitions and follow-up approaches mean it should not be used to compare project effectiveness.

Table 11: Summary of performance against installation targets

	Measures installed	Achieved vs forecast (%)	Conversion rate*
Basingstoke and Deane	47	24%	1%
BVSC	718	51%	11%
CSE (Futureproof Wiltshire)	675	865%	43%
East Lindsey	420	84%	11%
GMCA	3774	71%	20%
North of Tyne	441	168%	46%
Plymouth ECT	392	105%	15%
Rossendale	102	69%	9%
SELCE	48	15%	3%
Surrey CC	168	71%	8%
Testlands Wellbeing Hub	48	n.a.	3%
WYCA	211	703%	16%
YES Energy Solutions	69	6%	8%

Source: DESNZ monitoring data (revised forecast)

* Conversion rate refers to the proportion of households advised which proceed to install measures.

Survey findings

The customer survey provides evidence on a range of intermediate outcomes, including increased customer understanding and confidence, and whether households decided to install measures (described in section 3.3.4)

[66] Eligible products varied in scale from energy efficiency light bulbs through to heat pumps, insulation and solar panels. Take up was reported to be greater for smaller products e.g. light bulbs, draught excluders and thermal blinds and curtains

However, due to the limitations described in 3.2.1, reported outcomes may not be representative of all advised households. The survey sample is only broadly representative for Surrey and North of Tyne, where most advised households received a home visit. Further detail, including a comparison of survey and project-reported data, is provided in the technical annex.

Table 11 summarises responses to the survey questions set out in section 3.3.5 aimed at capturing evidence of positive outcomes, ranging from hard outcomes, such as deciding to install retrofit measures or applying for government funding, to softer outcomes that indicate progress along the retrofit journey (improved understanding of relevant measures for their home, increased confidence in the effectiveness of these measures and increased confidence about navigating the retrofit process). Figures highlighted in green or red indicate statistically significant differences compared to the overall survey average: green signifies that the project's result was significantly higher than average, while red indicates it was significantly lower.

The key findings are as follows:

- **Surrey County Council's project stands out across multiple indicators**. Respondents who received support from this project were significantly more likely to report positive outcomes for all measures except applying for government funding. This suggests the project was particularly effective in helping households progress along the retrofit journey and achieve tangible outcomes, such as deciding to install measures.
- **SELCE's project performed strongly in encouraging uptake of government funding schemes**. 54% of respondents said they had applied or intended to apply, a significantly higher figure than the average across all projects, indicating strong support in helping households access financial assistance.
- **Plymouth Energy Community Trust appears to have been effective in improving consumer understanding of the most relevant measures for their homes**. Respondents were also more likely to report decisions to install measures, increased confidence in retrofit effectiveness, and greater confidence navigating the retrofit process, although these differences were not statistically significant.

However, this analysis does not account for important differences between projects; to fully understand effectiveness, it is essential to consider the context in which each project was operating, particularly the characteristics of the households they supported and the specific challenges they faced.

Table 12: Percentage of survey respondents reporting outcomes by LEAD project

	Decided to install ee/retrofit measures	Applied or intending to apply for gov funding schemes	Improved understanding of most suitable measures for their home	More confident about the effectiveness of ee/retrofit measures	More confident about navigating the retrofit process
Basingstoke and Deane (n=61)	33%	17%	49%	33%	22%
BVSC (n=65)	9%↓	38%	37%	37%	35%
East Lindsey (n=123)	33%	40%	40%	33%	20%↓
GMCA (n=137)	33%	22%	34%↓	32%	26%
North of Tyne (n=108)	28%	30%	47%	35%	29%
Plymouth ECT (n=74)	39%	34%	62%↑	50%	41%
SELCE (n=59)	29%	54%↑	56%	46%	39%
Surrey (n=84)	45%↑	37%	74%↑	65%↑	56%↑
WYCA (n=91)	9%↓	13%↓	32%↓	34%	24%
YES Energy Solutions (n=70)	30%	22%	53%	43%	41%
Average for all responses	**29%**	**30%**	**47%**	**39%**	**31%**

Source: Consumer survey. Note: Green figures indicate a percentage that is statistically significantly higher than the average; red figures indicate a percentage that is significantly lower.

To give a more meaningful view of effectiveness, Figure 14 compares survey outcomes with the proportion of respondents from each project classified as hard-to-reach – defined more narrowly here as those on low incomes or unemployed, in households with multiple disabilities, or without internet access.

As discussed in Section 3.3.5, these groups were generally less likely to report positive outcomes than more engaged, able-to-pay households. It is therefore reasonable to expect that projects working with fewer hard-to-reach consumers may report better outcomes. The scatter charts broadly support this, showing an inverse relationship between the proportion of respondents who were hard-to-reach and a range of outcome indicators. However, this

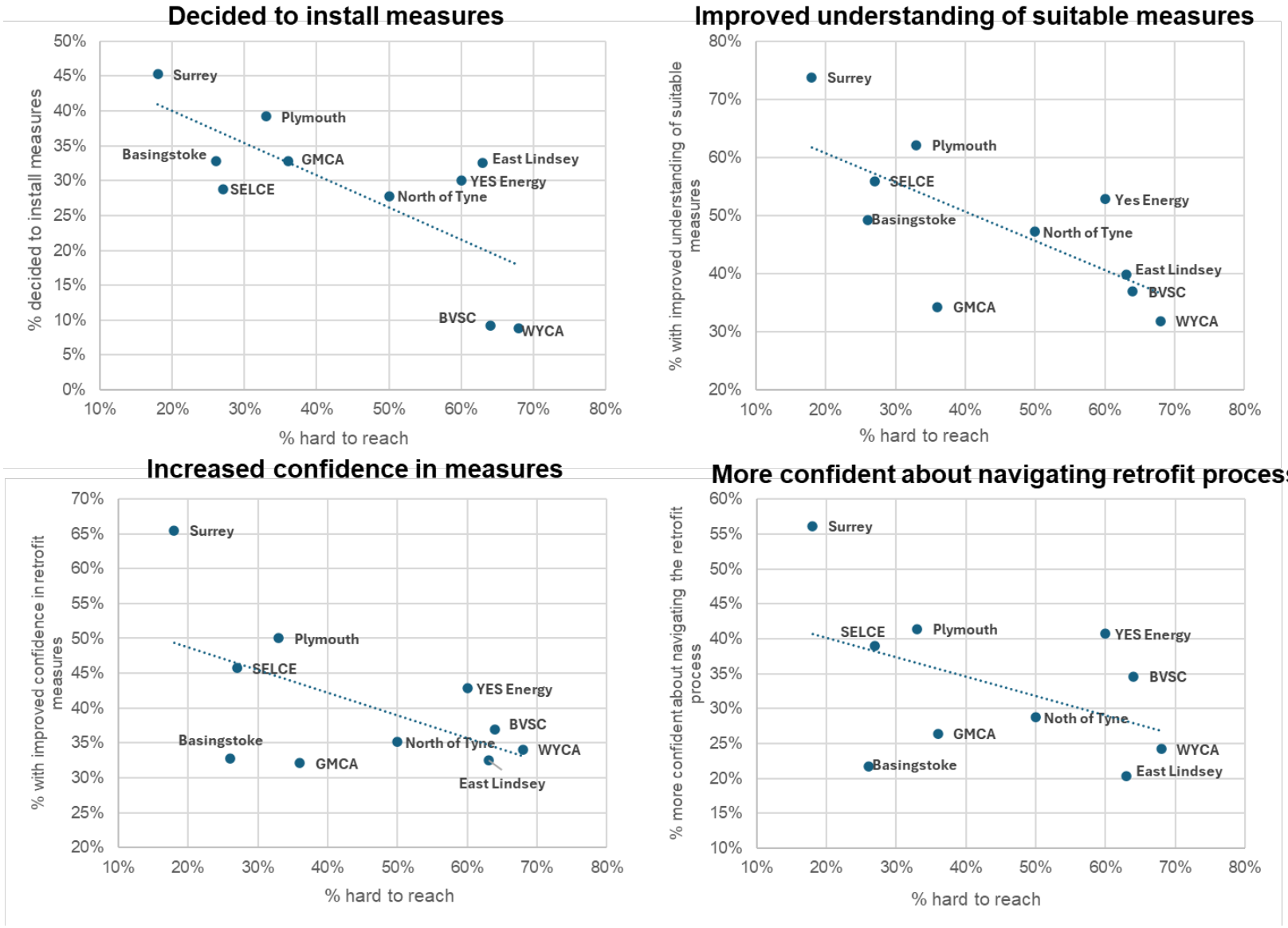
analysis is indicative only. The hard-to-reach definition, while helpful, remains a relatively crude measure and does not capture the full range of household characteristics or local contextual factors that may influence outcomes.

That said, the charts help identify projects that appear to have performed well given their participant profile, i.e. those above the line of best fit. For example, **YES Energy Solutions**, with 60% of respondents classed as hard-to-reach, achieved stronger outcomes than several other projects working with fewer hard-to-reach households. This may reflect the level of support. A higher proportion of respondents for YES reported receiving a home visit (74%) compared to, for example, 39% for GMCA. However YES also outperformed when focusing only on those who received a home visit, suggesting a particularly effective model for supporting more vulnerable households.

East Lindsey also performed well given its respondent profile (63% of survey respondents were classified as hard-to-reach), particularly in encouraging households to apply for government funding schemes (40%, second only to SELCE) and driving installations (33%, the highest among projects where at least half of respondents were hard-to-reach). However, scores on softer outcomes, such as confidence in retrofit measures and navigating the process, were lower. This suggests a focus on delivering tangible results, particularly identifying and supporting eligible households to access funding, rather than on broader awareness-raising.

The charts also support the earlier finding that the LEAD projects in Surrey and Plymouth performed strongly across a range of outcomes. Despite having a lower proportion of hard-to-reach customers, the analysis indicates that their results remain strong.

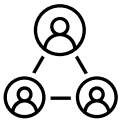
Figure 15: Scatter charts comparing reported outcomes with the percentage of respondents who were hard-to-reach



3.4.2 Effectiveness of delivering advice locally

The qualitative evidence gathered from projects and customers suggests that delivering advice locally can be effective as:

Locally based organisations / projects **understand the local housing stock** and the associated retrofit challenges. This is often due to their previous involvement in retrofit-related research and projects, and the knowledge and experience that they have developed as a result. In some cases, projects were able to access local data (e.g. through the local authority) on housing stock to aid their understanding. Projects are also familiar with specific local challenges e.g. damp and mould in homes, affected by the local geography and weather conditions.



When advice is delivered in-person by local people, **customers find it easier to relate to the advisers** and they are more trusting of the advice received, which helps with increasing their understanding. This is due to advisers often having a similar background, knowledge of the local area, familiar accents and even knowing some of the same people and families.

Delivery efficiencies are more likely to be achieved if the in-person advice is delivered by a local organisation, based close to customers, e.g. less time spent travelling to local events and customer homes, and greater flexibility to schedule and attend in-home visits.

There is a greater **ability to cross-refer between programmes / initiative** (whether or not they are concerned with energy efficiency and retrofit) with a stronger understanding of what is available locally. For example, some projects referred households to local grants for home upgrades concerned with mobility challenges. This in turn helps to build the customer's trust in the project and makes them more willing to consider energy efficiency advice.

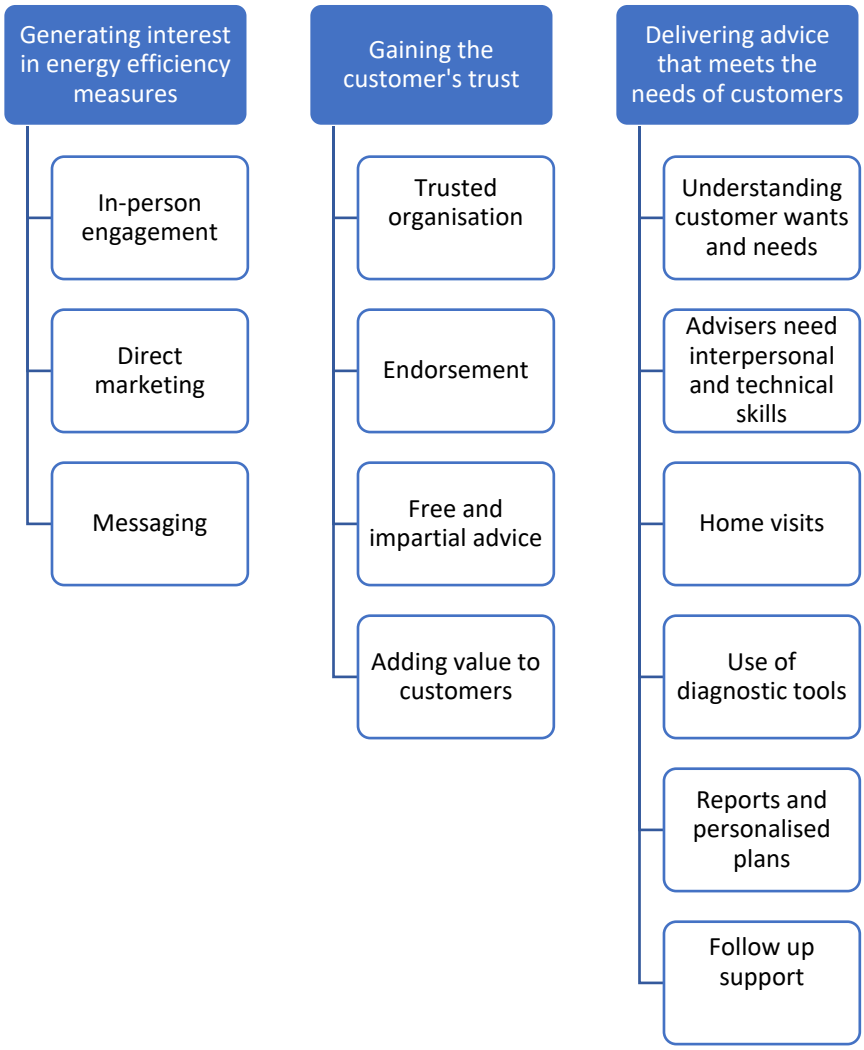
However, the research also found challenges associated with delivering in-person advice, which affected the effectiveness of the projects:

- The delivery organisations were not directly involved in the delivery and management of government funding schemes. Projects found it challenging to understand and keep updated with energy efficiency funding streams and their changing eligibility criteria**.** This is discussed further in section 3.4.5.
- As there wasn't a campaign to raise awareness of energy efficiency improvements at a national level, each project had to invest heavily in reaching and raising the awareness of energy efficiency home upgrades amongst customers.
- As each project is relatively small (compared to a large national scheme), the budget and the number of staff working on it is relatively small, and therefore it can be difficult to manage resources and deliver at scale.

3.4.3 What approaches were effective at engaging and advising customers?

Analysis across the case study projects identified clear themes about the approaches that were most effective at reaching and generating interest from customers and in advising customers about energy efficiency measures. The themes were generated from triangulated data sources, including from the projects themselves, survey and qualitative evidence from customers and the observations. These are summarised in the Figure below and discussed in the subsequent sections.

Figure 16: What approaches were effective at engaging and advising customers?



3.4.3.1 Generating interest in energy efficiency measures

In person engagement

Projects reported that in-person engagement is the most effective way of identifying hard-to-reach customers, noting that some customers would have been unlikely to respond to other marketing channels. Face-to-face approaches have included attendance at a variety of community events and community groups. The ethnographic research with customers and the

advice observations support the view of projects; many customers would have proactively sought energy efficiency advice, and the in-person engagement was key to them being open to accepting advice. In-person engagement allows for a tailored conversation between an adviser and a customer, and the opportunity to explain how proposals would benefit the customer. It also helps to build rapport and trust, which is difficult using written material, particularly when customers are sceptical about energy efficiency or the wider construction industry.

Projects found it more effective to attend events that were being hosted by other organisations rather than deliver them themselves. This was said to be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it was more cost-effective (no fees to hire venues, and less organisation time required). Secondly, the audience were less sceptical about the project as the community group had allowed them to be there.

Examples of effective community engagement approaches include:

- Rossendale used staff who were already embedded in the local community to attend a wide range of local events and groups such as church groups, libraries and GP surgeries, building a local presence.
- East Lindsey invested in an Energy Van and took this to a wide range of community events and groups. This involved delivering short talks in a group setting and then making advisers available to speak one to one with customers, using the Energy Van as a place for a quiet conversation and to show customers examples of measures.
- Plymouth found that holding and attending events in small towns with a sense of community to be effective in generating interest.
- BVSC used voluntary and faith groups to generate interest.
- Basingstoke reached customers through having a stand in high footfall venues such as a shopping centre, supermarkets and at a hospital. They used a model of an eco-house to attract the attention of customers and engage them in a conversation.

Whilst in person engagement was deemed to be effective at reaching hard-to-reach customers, it should be noted that:

- Generating interest from customers in the summer seemed less effective. Projects thought this was because customers are less concerned about cold homes and energy use at this time of year.
- Some events were inevitably less successful; projects acknowledged that community engagement is affected by multiple factors e.g. time of day, time of year, venue etc., and that just because one event hasn't worked well, it doesn't mean it would not be more successful under different circumstances. This was also evidenced through the event observations conducted as part of the evaluation.
- This type of engagement is likely to reach both non-HTR customers as well hard-to-reach customers, and projects felt they should advise all customers that were interested.

Direct marketing

Some projects were successful at engaging customers through targeted direct marketing, although it should be noted that these customers tended to be less hard-to-reach than those reached by other projects. Examples include:

- CSE FutureProof used EPC and household income data to target homes in the £30,000-£60,000 household income bracket. They delivered a direct mail campaign offering a free home survey, which they said generated a lot of interest amongst customers who already had some level of interest in energy efficiency. The project reported that customers found the offer of a free home survey from an impartial organisation particularly attractive, and this was supported by customers who participated in qualitative interviews.

  > *"We moved on to lower income households, above the threshold for ECO / HUG, up to around £60k. This had really high uptake. The survey was free to the homeowner, and we wonder if the CSE / Futureproof brand was a bit better known among these households. The messaging we used involved a bit of everything, saving carbon, saving money, warmer homes. We knew people would have different motivations, so we didn't want to stick to just one message."*
  >
  > (CSE Futureproof LEAD)

- Surrey used direct marketing to target homes using deprivation data. They conducted a mass mail out in partnership with other organisations. They reported this to be effective in generating enquiries and sign-ups to the project however it was resource intensive, particularly to ensure all partners were satisfied with the wording.
- Rossendale worked with GP surgeries to identify patients with health conditions that could be eligible for funding. GPs sent text messages to patients informing them of the project's advice. Messaging focused on achieving warmer, healthy homes, linked to improving health conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. This were successful as:
  - The project delivery staff had been embedded in the local community for a long time and had good connections and working relationships with local organisations, including GPs.
  - They linked up with a GP who had some responsibility for 'Population Health and Health Inequalities' in the region.
  - The link between cold, damp homes, levels of deprivation and health conditions was well evidenced in Rossendale.

  It is worth noting that Basingstoke also tried to engage with GP surgeries but were unsuccessful. They assumed the surgeries were too busy to engage.

Messaging

Projects reported that use of the term retrofit was not effective at generating customer interest as customers did not understand it. They varied the terminology that they used and found

terms related to warmer, more comfortable homes and saving money on energy bills more effective.

3.4.3.2 Gaining the customer's trust

Projects used different approaches to gain the trust of customers, both through demonstrating their credibility and the type of support that they provided. Successful methods include:

Support delivered by a known, trusted organisation. Basingstoke, East Lindsey and Surrey felt that using the council's brand was important in engaging customers and cultivating trust. Similarly, CSE FutureProof said their reputation in the local community helped overcome the trust barrier that some customers faced. Some customers noted that they took the advice because they trusted the council to provide impartial advice.

Using other trusted organisations to endorse their advice was helpful in encouraging customers to engage. Examples include:

- Plymouth engaging with local employers to deliver energy efficiency advice in the workplace using the employer as the 'trusted organisation'.
- Rossendale who worked closely with Citizens Advice and GP surgeries, both of which are seen by customers as trusted sources.

Offering free and impartial advice. This was very important to all customers, some of whom had had negative experiences with tradespeople in the past. Customers explained that the fact that the advice was from one source, clear, thorough and impartial made them feel as though the advisor wanted what was best for them, which increased trust in the advice delivered.

> *"Yes, I think it is objective information. He is from the council in Wigan; it is not salespeople or whatever. No commercial interest at all."* (Customer, GMCA)

> *"We weren't being sold anything. In the past, there was a guy who came round about solar panels. I knew quite quickly that it was not viable but as soon as I said that he packed up and went. What I liked about this project is that they are just trying to help people get something done. It is impartial and nobody's trying to force you to buy something. It feels like the people are more on your side."* (Customer, Rossendale)

Adding value over and above providing energy efficiency advice. Projects found that adding value to the customer, demonstrating that they were doing what they could to help the customer, was an effective way of gaining trust. Some projects found that some customers were less ready for advice about the installation of measures (e.g. due to financial difficulties, mental health issues). Examples include:

- Several projects said **energy saving tips** were a fundamental part of their advice provision (e.g. Basingstoke, BVSC, North of Tyne, Rossendale, Testlands and YES Energy). They did this to help customers with 'quick wins' to save money and energy, build rapport and trust, and increase their readiness for advice about energy efficiency measures in the future.

- Some projects **provided free items**. E.g. BVSC and WYCA. These include energy saving light bulbs, draught proof tape / draught excluders, shower timers, hot water bottles and warm hats.
- Some projects (e.g. East Lindsey, North of Tyne, Rossendale and Testlands) described providing a **broader advice offer** to vulnerable customers as an effective way of gaining the trust of customers and ensuring that the advice generated the intended outcomes. Providing broader advice helps customers to overcome barriers they face such as energy debts, feeding their family or well-being issues. The projects hope that the provision of this advice makes customers more ready for advice on energy efficiency measures in the future.

Qualitative research with customers corroborates the importance of the above.

East Lindsay

East Lindsay invested in an energy van to take advice to rural, often isolated communities.

What worked?
East Lindsay quickly learned the challenging circumstances that their target audience faced. They encountered customers who had energy debts, were struggling to provide for their families, and homes that were poorly maintained. The project used messaging on 'saving money on energy bills' to engage customers as a way of building rapport to then go on to provide much-needed additional support.

Additional support included:

- Providing fuel vouchers to support families who cannot afford their heating.
- Providing advice and support to resolve energy debts.
- Referrals to other sources of support e.g. the Council's well-being centre.

The project argues that this support increases the customer's readiness for advice on energy efficiency measures in the future. They have been able to help customers who would have been reluctant to reach out for help for fear of being judged.

What worked less well?

Though this project performed well at the proportion of hard-to-reach customers installing measures, it performed less well at achieving softer outcomes, such as confidence in measures and navigating the process. This suggests a focus on delivering tangible results, particularly through accessing funding, rather than on general awareness-raising.

Contextual factors

East Lindsay's customers were among the most HTR of the case study projects.

As the support was delivered by the local council, they were able to deliver this project in line with the council's other aims to support residents.

3.4.3.3 Delivering advice that meets the needs of customers

The diversity of the customer base (see section 3.3.2) means that the type of advice that each customer wants or needs is unique, and a one size fits all approach to advice provision is unlikely to be effective. The sub-sections below highlight aspects of advice provision valued by customers participating in the evaluation, and that increase the likelihood that the advice meets the needs of customers.

Understanding customer wants and needs

Some projects built in a specific step in the customer journey to understand more about the customer, their circumstances and their home. Successful approaches include:

- CSE FutureProof, Plymouth and GMCA conducted telephone conversations with customers before providing them with advice in a home visit.

  > *"The adviser will always have had a conversation with the individual before the visit, to find out a little bit more about them and their home – nobody goes blind to a visit, so they can prepare beforehand. And they've started to set up that trust, they know a bit about us and what we can do beforehand. Secondly the visits are very customer led; that doesn't mean we don't have a structure, but the structure is there to draw out what the person wants us to talk about…"* (Plymouth LEAD)

  CSE Futureproof adapted their pre-survey approach during delivery to increase its effectiveness. This involved changing the number and types of questions they asked customers before conducting a home visit. They reported that a careful balance is needed between finding out as much useful information as possible to help the adviser prepare for the visit and not burdening the customer and putting them off the home visit. Questions asked by the project include financial considerations, the customer's motivations for seeking advice, their willingness or readiness for disruption in the home and individual circumstances (e.g. age, health). Customer feedback in the qualitative research suggested that CSE's approach to understanding customer wants and needs was an effective way of tailoring the advice to their needs.

- Rossendale used two advisers for each home visit, one who focused on the technical aspects of the home and the other engaged with the customer about their motivations, wants, needs and constraints (see home visit observation example overleaf).

Home visit observation (2), Rossendale

Customer:

Jane and Jack, a couple in their 60s, attended an appointment at their local health centre, where the LEAD had a stand. The couple live in a pre-1900 home, with multiple external, solid walls with an old boiler and old, draughty windows and their home has some damp issues. They were keen to improve the comfort of their home and reduce their energy bills but were limited by their home and budget. The couple signed up to a home visit.

Advice

Two advisers attended the home visit, one independently surveyed the home and carried out the assessment for a new EPC certificate. The second adviser asked lots of questions about the couple, their home and their interests, what they were hoping to get from the advice, and covered energy use, energy bills, resources for managing energy use, identifying and applying for government funding schemes.

The customer was advised about relevant insulation options for solid wall properties and were told that they could be eligible for ECO4 and / or GBIS grant funding, after completing the eligibility assessment of their behalf.

Evaluator reflections

Building a good rapport with consumers outside of just delivering advice improves the experience

- Advisors spent a lot of time speaking with the consumers about their lives, such as about their artwork and careers. This developed a strong rapport which the customers appreciated.
- Advisers took time to understand what the customer's wanted to get out of the advice, this meant the advice could be tailored, and that the customers were well engaged and interested in the discussion throughout.
- Throughout the advice, it was clear that the consumers understanding was improving. It was also clear that they trusted the advisors as experts who had their best interests at heart.
- As an observer, it seemed highly likely that the consumers would go on to follow up with the actions suggested and implement measures.

In contrast, some projects were less successful at understanding the unique wants and needs of customers. For example:

- Some projects used 'funding eligibility checkers' as their main tool to decide on next steps and whether further advice was needed. Whilst these tools were described by customers as quick and efficient, they may not have resulted in a good understanding of what customers wanted to achieve in their home. Examples include GMCA.[67]
- In general, where lighter touch advice was provided, e.g. during an event, there was less opportunity for advisers to understand what customers want / need from the advice, and to prepare before providing advice.

Advisers need technical and interpersonal skills.

Interpersonal as well as technical skills are important in being able to provide accurate advice, to build a relationship with the customer and to ensure customer understanding through communicating in a meaningful way. This was emphasised by both project staff and customers participating in the research. For example, satisfied customers nearly always mentioned the expertise and the friendliness of the adviser. Ensuring customers feel encouraged and confident to act – not judged or patronised – is crucial.

Projects appear to have been effective at using advisers with the right skills to engage with customers about energy efficiency. Projects and delivery partners reached beyond the energy efficiency advice sector (e.g. into education and/or social care) to recruit staff, recognising the importance of communication and interpersonal skills.

Projects took different approaches to adviser skills:

- Rossendale sent two advisers to each home visit (as mentioned in the section above on 'Understanding customer wants and needs' and described in the 'Home visit observation, Rossendale 2' example above). One adviser concentrated on the technical assessment and the second one built rapport with the customer and provided them with practical support (e.g. to fill in forms).
- Projects employed advisers with greater expertise and qualifications in retrofit (e.g. CSE Futureproof and Plymouth).
- Other projects used staff with strong interpersonal skills during community engagement approaches to build rapport, later referring customers to an adviser with a technical background to conduct the home visit e.g. Basingstoke and GMCA.

The customer example below demonstrates the importance of the skillset of the adviser in building rapport, gaining customer trust and how this encourages the customer to take action.

[67] The tool took a funding led approach whereby it focused on identifying whether the customer was eligible for funding and if so, what measures would be eligible for funding, rather than taking a customer led approach e.g. identifying the most appropriate measures for the individual's home and their circumstances (whether there was funding available or not).

Ethnographic case study, Plymouth (Jeannie)

Customer

Jeannie lives alone in a 1930s semi-detached home with brick cavity walls. She has recently installed a new gas boiler and wooden floor downstairs with under-floor insulation. She feels the cold and would like a warmer home but is careful about the amount of energy she uses *"because it is expensive."* She uses an air fryer for cooking, a thick duvet rather than turning the heating on in the bedroom, and limits heating use through a timer.

Advice

Jeannie spotted an article about the project in the Council's email newsletter and contacted them to make an appointment for a home visit. The home visit covered energy saving tips, advice on insulation and government funding schemes.

Straight after the visit, Jeannie organised work to fit an insulation jacket to her hot water tank, fix holes in the external brickwork and got a quote to replace three windows. She also replaced the draughtproofing to the front door herself.

Evaluator reflections

Jeannie's home is in good condition, and several energy saving measures were already in place. The home visit made Jeannie feel confident she could do more by:

- Making her feel capable – that she had already achieved a lot; and didn't need to feel guilty about what she hadn't done.
- Identifying some "quick fixes" that were immediately achievable.
- Impartially validating the next step, she had already mentally budgeted for (replacement windows).

The combination of interpersonal and technical skills, with quick response times, means that Jeannie trusts the advice and has been encouraged to take action.

"…the advice was given really clearly and…I wasn't pressured into thinking, oh, I've got to really do this. It was all about personal choice …things that I've never thought about doing in the past, quite simple things that I wouldn't have thought about."

"[The advisor] did it in a clear and non-patronising way without making me feel at all guilty that some of the things that I could have done but haven't gotten around to. The assessor had a really nice manner…"

"It's been on my mind for ages about getting the windows done, but I think I just needed someone else to say that actually it would make a difference..."

Home visits

Almost all case study projects reported the value of conducting home visits as:

- It increases the accuracy of advice and recommendations as the adviser has appreciated the home and its unique characteristics and issues;
    - Projects reported that many customers do not have a good awareness and understanding of their home. The information they provide to the adviser is often inaccurate, increasing the risk of incorrect advice and recommendations.
    - Advisers say seeing the home provides them with a better understanding of potential issues that would need to be rectified before the installation of measures, e.g. hoarding issues or a poorly maintained roof.
- It is more effective at increasing customer understanding as the adviser can point to and show to the customer specific issues in their home. This is even more important for customers where language barriers might be an issue or who have lower levels of literacy.
- The adviser is more easily able to spot quick wins e.g. by looking at the boiler flow, whether the radiators need bleeding, or adjusting TRVs. Projects reported that this adds value to the customer and builds trust and rapport, and the qualitative research found several examples of customers who were very grateful for this type of advice.

The customer example overleaf (Pat, Plymouth) demonstrates the effectiveness of home visits in providing accurate advice and aiding customer understanding.

Use of diagnostic tools

Some projects (e.g. Basingstoke, CSE Futureproof East Lindsey and Testlands) trialled, to different extents, the use of diagnostic tools such as air leakage tests and thermal imaging as part of their home visit / survey approach. These projects reported that the tools were effective at gaining the customer's interest and aided customer understanding relating to the issues in the home and where to prioritise their effort. Views expressed by projects include:

> *"The survey is in the home with a thermal imaging camera. It mainly focuses on the heating system and cold spots, so they can look at draughts.* ***They can tell a lot****; often the heating system is on a too high flow temperature, or the radiators need bleeding, or the TRVs could be used better, or block up draughts that make a big difference but don't need to cost the customer much money."* (Basingstoke)
>
> *"We've trialled new technologies, heat loss diagnostics—seeing how that could be integrated into our home surveys to improve the advice we give to households, e.g. thermal imaging, leak checking, a heat loss test with sensors. We learned that the leak checking, essentially either a window or door fan, to adjust the pressure in the property, and the thermal imaging when used in conjunction,* ***these were useful in helping us develop our voice, and improve it and hone it further, because you can really understand what is going on with the property.*** *We believe it is motivating for the homeowner to see the thermal images, and seeing the*

Ethnographic case study, Plymouth (Pat)

Customer

Pat moved into a 1950s, end of terrace home two years ago. It has *"poured concrete walls"* and solid floors. She struggles to keep the house warm and tries to limit her expenditure (e.g. washing in cold water, wearing lots of layers, only eating hoot food 3-5 times per week, using a flask for hot drinks to minimize use of the kettle, using battery candles in other rooms, and taping polystyrene to party walls to keep in the heat.)

Pat had reservations about the accuracy of her home's EPC, looked for energy saving measure advice online and spoke to her energy supplier, who referred her to the project.

Advice

Pat received a home visit; and was pleased that the advisor:

- Was "amenable" to conducting a whole house inspection and listened to her concerns.
- Was able to provide very specific advice on how to get round physical barriers to insulating an opened-up outhouse (including reconfiguring a door, window and wall).
- Confirmed that her concerns about the EPC were inaccurate (The EPC stated that the house had cavity wall insulation and partial suspended floors – the advisor confirmed neither are correct for the type of construction).
- Applied for a Connected for Warmth grant for loft insulation on her behalf.

Following the visit, Pat has had loft insulation installed. She is also considering other recommendations such as floor insulation but needs to save up first.

Evaluator reflections

- Given Pat's suspicions and concerns, the impartial, home visit was effective at overcoming the trust barrier, and providing the information and advice that she was looking for.
- Providing advice during the home visit led to better customer understanding and boosted her confidence, turning intentions into action.

"Having the advisor walk around the house and be so willing to answer specific questions relating to issues in the house has been infinitely more useful than receiving generalised information."

"As somebody interested in energy saving already, and a homeowner for more than 36 years, I had a pretty good idea about the problems this house has with heat leakage, but confirmation from the energy advice service has given me confidence in my assessment of the issues and the possible rectifications."

action. We think that has been a really successful part of the trial."

(CSE Futureproof)

Customers also described the value of heat loss surveys in their decision making;

"The house is all single glazed at the moment. I think from a comfort perspective, secondary glazing would be the easiest thing to do. ***Seeing the results of the heat loss survey, it has given me the push to know that replacing the windows will make a big difference****."*

(CSE Futureproof customer)

Reports and personalised plans

The evidence strongly suggests that customers are more likely to understand the advice and take action if they are provided with a summary of the advice and recommended actions in a written format. Reports were a feature of some projects (e.g. Basingstoke, CSE FutureProof, Surrey and Plymouth) as a way of communicating home survey findings to customers and providing them with the details about what to do and when.

Whilst in general the provision of a report and personalised plan was viewed positively, the evidence also suggests that customers want varying levels of detail (depending on their ability to understand, the complexity of the recommendations and the amount of money they may have to invest.) It is therefore difficult to produce a template report that meets the needs of all customers.

Views from CSE Futureproof customers (less hard to reach, able to pay, with some existing interest and knowledge in retrofit) participating in the qualitative interviews describe their experience of the reports they received:

"There was a lot of detail in there but also a summary that made it really clear and easy to understand. It was personalised - we talked when he was here and ***he took on board what he saw and what we discussed.*** *There is a lot of explanatory stuff in the report. There were some costings in there that were useful, something about how much disruption there would be which is a consideration both for the insulation and the heat pump, and a list in priority order of what you could actually do and that was helpful as we could work though the list and decide what we wanted to do." (CSE Futureproof customer)*

“The report that came back was really detailed with 77 pages and 5 different scenarios. It's called a home retrofit plan. It took some reading and that's been part of my delay. It's not something that I can get wrong. It's a massive outlay for a ground source heat pump so I need time to review it properly and get my head around it. ***I think it was very clear and easy to understand, but the length was a bit off-putting.*** *I needed to read it a couple of times before I felt I understood what to do. Some people would find this way, way beyond their ability.” (CSE Futureproof customer)*

“It was excellent, an outstanding report. It was thorough, everything was clearly explained. The fact I got it for free is a bonus as it's the sort of report you would

probably pay a fair bit for. ***It was all personalised, he'd done the measurements, the calculations, the pictures.****" (CSE Futureproof customer)*

There was appetite amongst customers self-funding measures for information about **return on investment of measures and finance options** to help them make a decision whether to install, and if so, what to install. Some projects were not able to provide this advice. For example, they did not have the skills / experience to do this, or there wasn't enough time within the advice approach to cover this. Some projects expressed that they were not familiar with finance options available to customers.

"I could see some people had done some internal plastering and were enthusiastic, some people had a heat pump and said it was great. But some measures are quite expensive so it's good to understand what works well for you, what will get the best return and be the best value for money. I think I expected [the project] to see everything as a whole, evaluate the different choices and then prioritise in terms of the impact that they would have." (CSE Wiltshire customer)

However, some projects did advise some customers with the likely return on investment (e.g. Plymouth, Surrey), and many customers concluded that the return on investment was not sufficient to motivate them to install the recommended measures.

The customer example below (Home visit (1), Rossendale) demonstrates the value of using diagnostic tools during the home visit and providing a summary report.

Learnings from home visits, diagnostic tools and reports

Following on from the above, a number of the case study projects offered a similar delivery model - free home visits, using diagnostic tools to assess the home and providing a follow up report. Each project adapted their approach during delivery in response to customer feedback and performance against KPIs.

The differences in the approaches tested (e.g. the extent and focus of adviser skills, the length and detail of visits and reports) have resulted in the following learnings:

- **Some consistency in the approach is valuable in order to control cost and quality.**
  For example, Basingstoke used a relatively simple Thermafy survey approach to identify heat loss issues, which produced an auto-generated summary report. Whilst this was relatively cost-effective, some customers doubted the advice because it wasn't tailored enough to their home / circumstances.
- **One approach is unlikely to be sufficient** in meeting the needs of a broad range of customers. This is due to:
    - Differences in customer expectations, wants and needs:
        - Some customers want a more thorough and detailed approach (e.g. so that they trust the advice, to inform what measures they invest their own money in). CSE Futureproof and Plymouth

Home visit observation (1), Rossendale

Customer

Jessica lives with her husband and two young children. She is Belgian and her partner is Czech. They live in a large detached 1920s house. The home's features mean it could be subject to building regulations and also make it cold.

Jessica had been actively looking into heat pumps, solar panels and under-floor heating but could not afford the investment.

Advice

Jessica took the advice to try and reduce her energy bills and lower their home's carbon footprint. The home visit lasted 3.5 hours, which was longer than most, due to the property's age, size and measures that the customer was interested in. During the home visit, the adviser:

- Checked the extent of language barriers (and offered use of a translation app).
- Discussed issues that Jessica had initially provided about the home, to check they had understood correctly and whether there was anything else that should be covered.
- Used tools such as a measuring tape, a torch, thermal camera, asbestos kit and a regular camera to collect evidence for the report.
- Was very thorough, covering the outside of the property and every room in the house, focusing on known problems and checking the entirety of each room. The advisor spoke in detail through everything they were doing and seeing. They did lots of physical demonstrations, pointing and often asked the customer to stand in their place and use their tools to see the issue themselves.
- Made references and comparisons to explain complex concepts in layman terms, e.g. *Have you noticed x when staying here?'* to reference experiences instead of asking technical questions
- Summarised their findings at the end of the visit and said that they would send them a written report.

The final report consisted of smaller and more substantial measures, recommended contractors and the results of eligibility checks for government funding schemes.

Jessica was particularly grateful for the advice on solar panels and believed that the advice was useful to confirm that this would not be a worthwhile investment. She plans on addressing issues with the chimney and would like to proceed with installing an alternate heat source, specifically a pallet burning stove, however this will require them to save before it is viable.

Evaluator's reflections:

- Throughout advice delivery, it was evident that things would have been missed, comments misunderstood or connections between problems and solutions not made **if the advisor had not been there in person**. This was appreciated specifically due to the language barrier and age / size of the home which means general advice does not always apply.
- **The survey approach using diagnostic tools and visual demonstrations** gave the customer confidence that the recommendations were accurate and relevant for their home.
- The customer was nervous that they wouldn't remember all of the information provided during the visit and was reassured that the adviser said they would include it all in a **summary report**.

"You cannot deliver such information by phone or online, you need to be on the spot to see exactly what is happening." (Customer)

successfully delivered this type of approach, supported by relatively knowledgeable and experienced retrofit advisers.

- Other customers prefer advice relating to one specific issue or measure (this might be because they are overwhelmed by too much information, or because they lack time or financial resources to install larger or wider scale measures). The detailed approaches and report used by CSE Futureproof and Plymouth may overwhelm and frustrate some customers. Forcing this type of customer through a more in-depth survey approach may not be effective.

  - Differences in the complexity of the properties (size, construction, extent of unique features) warrant different types of survey approach.

- **More in-depth, complex approaches are inevitably more expensive to deliver**. However, it is more likely that this approach can provide detail on the costs of measures and the potential return on investment, that able to pay customers may need to make decisions.
- **Having more than one survey / report approach** is valuable to cover different levels of complexity. This not only ensures that the approach selected meets the expectations and needs of the customer, but also makes sure that the time and resource spent by the adviser is proportionate to what the customer may be able to achieve). For example Plymouth offered two types of survey:
  - A one-hour free home visit, which the project said was effective at providing customers with relatively simple recommendations and encouraging them to take action.
  - A more detailed, through survey approach, which was effective in more complex cases, when customers wanted to consider larger scale measures, or

when the customer needed more convincing about the options available to them, the costs of measures and their potential cost savings / return on investment.

- Regardless of the number of approaches used, **a degree of further tailoring** is required to ensure customer needs are met, and that the advice and recommendations are relevant and accurate. This might include:
    - Content of the advice e.g. answering specific questions raised by the customer, and / or coverage of unique features or issues in the home.
    - How the advice is provided; Examples include the length of the visit (how much time the customer can spare), whether the customer accompanies the adviser around the home or not, the extent to which diagnostic tools / visual aids are needed to identify issues and increase customer understanding, tailoring the language used to ensure customer understanding.
    - Ensuring that the written report includes coverage of specific points raised by the customer during the survey to ensure that the customer feels heard.

Surrey delivered a more tailored offering. This is described in the case study below.

Surrey

In-home surveys were a core component of delivery of the project with a relatively high proportion of customers receiving a visit. Alongside a 'standard' home survey and report, there were two variants delivered by two different partners; one for able-to-pay households and one for households requiring more intensive support in accessing funding.

What worked?

As well as offering different services to customers dependent on whether they were eligible for funding or able and willing to pay, further tailoring of the support was encouraged, providing a variety of routes to energy efficiency improvements dependent on the customer's circumstances. Particularly for vulnerable customers who face competing priorities, the project took steps to simplify the landscape for support with the provision of extra support to help with piecing together funding streams to help them install measures.

The project achieved the highest increases in understanding reported by customers and highest satisfaction levels demonstrating the positive effect of tailored delivery.

Volunteers were used to deliver the some of the in-home surveys. Called 'community champions' they were trusted by customers as they were not seen to be selling anything.

Contextual considerations

The customer profile was less hard to reach than for other projects. Less in-person community engagement was required to encourage customers to take up the offer of support and some forms of direct marketing were effective. Relationships with other organisations were developed to generate referrals.

Providing end to end and / or follow up support

Some projects provided advice and support over several interactions with customers (e.g. North of Tyne, Plymouth, Rossendale and Surrey), albeit to varying extents and not necessarily to all their customers.

The evidence suggests, and projects learned that, there is significant customer appetite for follow up support beyond the initial advice provision, many customers need support at different stages of the customer journey to help them make an installation decision, and that advice provided solely in one interaction is unlikely to be effective. The main reason for consumer dissatisfaction was a perceived lack of follow up from the project, i.e. typically consumers who received advice and then did not hear from the LEAD again.

> *"My one big learning is follow-up, follow-up, follow-up."* (Basingstoke LEAD)
>
> *"Follow-up is important. Going back to customers again, that account management piece."* (WYCA LEAD)
>
> *"We have to provide more follow-up support, particularly in more complex cases."* (East Lindsay LEAD)

The type of follow-up support wanted / needed will vary by customer, but the evidence suggests that customers would like follow-up support to do one or more of the following:

- Ask questions about the advice that was given and better understand the next steps.
- Discuss changes in their circumstances (either about their home, their wants / needs / motivations, or factors that might affect their eligibility for funding).
- Hand-holding support to undertake the next steps. This may include practical support to complete a funding application, liaising with a supplier or installer on behalf of the customers, or staying with an anxious customer whilst installations are carried out. Some projects were not able to provide this level of support, whilst also meeting their target number of customers advised.
- Reassure them that what they are doing is right.
- Providing details of quality assured installers and / or quality assuring installations.

Rossendale and YES Energy are examples of different approaches used by projects to deliver end to end support (see case studies below). The two project case studies are followed by two customer case studies that help to demonstrate the value of advice over multiple interactions.

Rossendale

Rossendale targeted customers through a wide range of community events. They provided advice at events and also offered home visits.

What worked?

Advisers found the app to be a very effective CRM tool. They were able to record information after each customer interactions, noting actions and things for the adviser to follow up and when. The app sent the adviser reminders. Advisers said this enabled them to keep customers up to date with progress (e.g. on decisions about funding eligibility), check on progress made by the customer if set, and to generally motivate customers to stay engaged in the process. The project acknowledged that multiple interactions with each customer is resource intensive, however the app made the process efficient.

What didn't work?

The app was not effective at initially engaging customers. Customers were reluctant to or were not able to scan the QR code and download the ap and / or input their information into the app. However, customers were generally happy for advisers to do this on their behalf, once the adviser had reassured them about the legitimacy of the app.

Contextual factors

The project served a broad range of HTR customers. Many lacked digital skills/confidence.

YES Energy

YES Energy used the LEAD funding to expand the scope, scale and nature of the support they were already providing to vulnerable households. The key change was to in-person advice, largely through in-home surveys, from a previously remote-only form of delivery. All elements of the customer journey (including installation) were delivered by YES Energy, leveraging the skills and assets they had been using for previous delivery

What worked?

The in-house delivery model worked well in moving customers along the journey in both a timely and flexible way with the ability to make the experience feel 'seamless' for the customer. With autonomy over their own resourcing, the project had a short lead-in time for scheduling in-home surveys and opportunities to be flexible in providing support at various stages in the journey e.g. sitting with an anxious customer whilst the installer carried out works. The survey evidence suggests that this approach contributed to better outcomes when compared to projects with a similar customer profile.

What didn't work?

In the initial stages of the project, all customer engagement was delivered in-house—hosting their own events and using their own social media. However, uptake was slow until the project expanded their engagement approach to identify potential customers at events and meetings hosted by other organisations in the communities they were targeting. They. They learned through delivery that endorsement from other trusted organisations to encourage referrals was more effective at generating interest.

Ethnographic case study, Plymouth (Helen)

Customer

Helen is a freelance journalist. She lives with her adult son in an old stone-built property which has no insulation and suffers from damp issues in cold months. She is concerned about energy price increases, has had two previous energy surveys, and felt the recommendations were *"hideously expensive and unfeasible".* She has made some energy efficiency improvements and would like to do more but doesn't have a regular salary to fund the investments. She is also aware that some of the house needs rewiring.

Advice

Helen received a face-to-face meeting, which lead to ongoing interaction with the advisor who helped to find out if she is eligible for funding. With the advisor's guidance, Helen is focusing first on insulating the kitchen and bathroom, and later the loft when she can afford it or get financial help.

Helen valued the following aspects of the LEAD service, which helped her to act:

- The advice including simple quick fixes, some of which would not cost anything to do
- The one-to-one in person meeting as it was easier to understand than previous advice
- That she knew the adviser personally and therefore trusts the advice as she knows it was thoroughly researched.

"[The advisor] is now looking into the other improvements my home needs which may be grant funded, that would be amazing. I do intend having this work done at some stage and that stage will be sooner if grant funded. She is also keeping in contact which is brilliant."

Evaluator's reflections

- Past one-off energy 'advice' (including the EPC) felt so unachievable that, for 5 years, she had done only basic DIY measures.
- **On-going contact with the LEAD seems to have changed the way Helen feels about bigger changes** (insulation and building work).
- Some of that change appears to be due to on-going advice, specifically help to navigate ways to make the work affordable.

Ethnographic case study, Rossendale (Susan)

Customer

Susan is in her 60s and lives on her own in a privately rented bungalow. Her disabilities mean she can no longer work and needs to stay warm. She feels restricted in what she can do because she rents her home.

Advice

Susan met the adviser at a group in her community. She received a home visit which included support with finding and applying for financial help. Getting personable, hands-on in-person help was crucial to create trust. Susan valued the adviser:

- Going to her home
- Having “extensive knowledge” and making it easy to follow what they were saying
- Completing forms on her behalf
- Following up after the visit with emails and phone calls.

“The service I have received so far has been amazing. Had it not been for [the LEAD] I wouldn't know where to begin with trying to find any of the information I've been given. I wasn't aware of any grants etc. that may be available to myself.”

Evaluator reflections

The advisor is leading and driving action that Susan is comfortable with. Action is entirely dependent on getting grants.

Getting finance hasn’t been easy. An ECO4 application was rejected. Her advisor is still supporting, lately helping Susan to apply for another grant to upgrade radiator controls. **The adviser is navigating various options – it’s too complicated for Susan to do.**

“I receive emails, texts and phone calls from [the advisor], who I believe goes above and beyond what she has to do.”

3.4.4 What approaches were less effective in engaging and advising customers?

The following approaches were reported to be less effective in engaging customers:

Use of digital tools to engage customers

Some projects found that customers are less willing and able to use digital tools or platforms as part of the advice than they expected. For example:

- Rossendale expected customers to scan a QR code, download their Fairer Warmth app, register their details and input information to determine whether they were eligible for funding. They quickly learned that consumers were reluctant to use a QR code, some did not understand what it was or lacked the digital skills and / or confidence to input the registration information themselves.

GMCA

The project:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) delivered the most ambitious project in terms of scale working with five different local partners to offer support across all districts in Local Manchester. Each partner had the autonomy to deliver support in line with their interests, experience and capabilities resulting in a wide variety of community engagement approaches (including attending events, direct mail and drop-ins) and methods of delivery (including home visits, events and use of a van fitted with examples of different measures).

What worked?

Two elements of delivery provided consistency across the project. Firstly, each local partner used the 'Feel the Benefit' brand in their delivery. The mutual reinforcement of the campaign built familiarity and credibility amongst consumers. Secondly, all partners used an online eligibility checker as a key part of their initial engagement, to see if customer would qualify for free or discounted home upgrades. This proved to be an effective way of capturing customer information and checking their eligibility for funding. Customers liked how quick, clear and easy it was to use.

As part of the project, GMCA partnered with a large retail store. Handing out discount vouchers, along with the availability of light-touch advice, appeared effective at encouraging customers to invest in simple measures such as loft insulation.

What didn't work?

As the initial engagement approach used by partners focused heavily on eligibility for funding, this often led to dissatisfaction or negative consequences when customers that initially presented as potentially eligible were not successful in accessing funding e.g. due to the interests and focus of installers. In some instances, proving eligibility was burdensome or carried unexpected (and unaffordable costs) e.g. obtaining letters from a GP.

- Similarly, GMCA found that whilst some consumers were happy to enter simple details into their eligibility tool, they were less confident with uploading evidence that is sometimes required for grant funding schemes (e.g. proof of income) and were therefore having to assist customers with this step. (See GMCA case study below).

To a certain extent this finding isn't a surprise. The intention of LEAD was to serve customers that would not ordinarily use the internet or a phoneline for advice, including the digitally excluded. Whilst for some customers internet access and / or poor digital skills are the main barrier to them using digital tools, projects have also found that many customers lack confidence in using them or have reservations about how their information will be used.

Lighter touch advice

The evidence suggests that **lighter touch advice provided at events or in groups** was less memorable for customers and unlikely to have made a difference to the customer's understanding of energy efficiency measures. The observation research found that customers

BVSC

The project:
BVSC effectively used community-led engagement – such as through faith and voluntary groups – to reach high numbers of hard-to-reach customers, particularly in ethnic minority communities (where English often isn't customers' first language) and deprived areas – all at a relatively low unit cost of £122 per household advised.

What worked?
Engaging customers in familiar settings (e.g. established faith and voluntary groups), with the support of community leaders, helped cement trust in the advice. Advisers fluent in prevalent languages and visual aids were used to overcome language barriers and help explain energy efficiency concepts.

What didn't work?
Group settings can prove challenging venues for providing advice; distractions in a busy venue decrease advice comprehension, and customers may not sufficiently recall the characteristics of their home to enable accurate bespoke advice.

Contextual considerations
Even where latent demand for energy efficiency measures existed, the local building stock – notably properties in a state of disrepair – prevented many customers from progressing to installation. Likewise, private renters or leaseholders were often interested in energy efficiency but were unsure whether they were able to make changes to their property.

High local deprivation meant inadequate funds remained a common barrier. In particular, intergenerational households (often found in ethnic minority communities) were frequently ineligible for government support due to the combined household income being above the threshold.

sometimes struggle to concentrate on what the adviser is saying in a group / event setting, they struggle to recall specific advice and ask for things to be written down which is difficult to do during an event, and that is more difficult for an adviser to understand customer wants, needs and circumstances. The BVSC case study below provides an example of this.

Support for more affluent customers
Two projects reported that the support they had designed for more affluent customers had not generated any interest and a third was only able to engage with this audience on a small scale.

Basingstoke and CSE offered a heavily discounted comprehensive home survey. Projects assume that the lack of interest was either due to customers not wanting to pay anything for this type of advice and / or these types of customers being less concerned about saving money on their energy bills (both of these projects received more interest in the free surveys offered to middle income households £30,000-£60,000).

3.4.5 What were the challenges and barriers affecting the effectiveness of LEADs?

The section above suggests areas of improvement for advice to improve the outcomes and increase the number of customers who progress towards installation of measures. However, LEAD has demonstrated that there are fundamental barriers in the customer journey, largely out of the control of the projects, that prevent customers from installing measures.

Challenges and barriers affective the effectiveness of LEADs

1. Affordability of measures
2. Process issues for government schemes
3. Eligibility for government schemes
4. Availability of installers
5. Issues with the property

This section explores each of these in turn.

3.4.5.1 Affordability of measures

Most projects who worked with customers that were ineligible for funding (i.e. household income over £30,000) said that very few customers were able to afford to pay for measures themselves. Affordability of even small improvements (a few hundred pounds) is out of reach when someone is struggling with energy costs. The survey evidence supports the qualitative evidence from projects with customers saying they would have installed if there were more funding schemes or if measures were less expensive.

The following customer case study highlights affordability of measures as a significant barrier.

Ethnographic case study, Rossendale (Mary)

Customer

Mary is older, lives alone, has significant health issues and limited financial resources. Since moving in five years ago, she had already invested in new doors and windows.

Advice

Mary received an email from her GP about the advice, she went along to the library where the project attended, and whilst there she booked a home visit.

The adviser did a new EPC and explained floor, loft, internal and external wall insulation and solar. Mary found this helpful as it provided her with direction and next steps. The adviser also suggested she would be eligible for funding because of her health conditions.

She is interested in external wall insulation as she thinks this make a big difference, but was told she is not eligible for funding, and that she would need to pay £20,000. She does not want internal wall insulation as she only decorated her home 5 years ago when she moved in.

Evaluator reflections

Affordability is the critical brake on Mary taking action

- There seems to be a grant eligibility conflict between her health status and not being on benefits and/or the house having a D-rated EPC.
- Mary can't afford the very large financial contribution required to go ahead with external wall insulation.
- She is now stuck – wanting to do insulation work but not knowing how or where to get financial help.

"I think if - I mean, it would have made a huge difference if I could have had the external insulation. At the moment, it feels a little bit as though I'm at the end of the road in a way. I don't mind contributing [to insulating the attic], but not huge amounts of money, I can't afford that."

3.4.5.2 The process for government funding schemes

For customers who are likely to be eligible for funding, the funding landscape was described by projects as confusing, and the current process for funding schemes was reported to be particularly challenging, requiring a lot more time and effort to assist customers with than anticipated.

Common issues experienced include:

- Projects were not a formal part of funding schemes and therefore:
    - They found it challenging to understand all the schemes, who they were delivered by, and their different eligibility criteria and timescales.
    - Projects were not kept up to date with changes in funding availability or eligibility criteria by funding delivery organisations, and projects were unable to influence the process. As a result, projects spent time advising and supporting customers to apply for funding, which sometimes resulted in no measures installed due to changes in the schemes. Where projects were delivered by the local authority, who also administer one or more funding scheme, this sometimes made it easier to communicate with the relevant individuals to get updates on progress but did not remove the challenge completely.
- The general waiting times for responses from suppliers / installers after projects referred customers were described as lengthy, often leaving projects and customers confused about progress on their application.
- The general lengthy process to access funding, and the duration of support that customers were expecting the project to provide.

    "We anticipated providing hand-holding support, but customers needed more throughout the process than we anticipated because they didn't understand the funding process" (Basingstoke)

    "We've learned that it is a long customer journey for most, particularly when funding is concerned." (Rossendale)

- Customer confusion about the role of the project in the funding schemes. Some dissatisfied customers perceive that access to advice about measures and accessing funding for measures is part of the same process and did not understand why projects were not able to provide updates on funding application progress, leading to dissatisfaction with the project and disengagement.

    Rossendale described their negative experience of trying to help one customer apply for GBIS funding:

    "We came across a lady eligible for GBIS; she is autistic and not very happy doing stuff online. We helped her do the application on GOV.UK in person. A few weeks later she got a text from Eon (which isn't her energy supplier) saying "you've applied to GBIS". There were quite a few spelling mistakes in the text message, and as she wasn't an Eon customer, she thought it might be a scam. Although reluctant, she called Eon who could only tell her that she may be eligible, redirecting her to apply on the government web site! She told them she had already done that. So, we sat down with her again and we looked at the list of suppliers involved in GBIS on the Ofgem website. There were only 2 suppliers who had a proper link that allowed you to apply for GBIS—the rest just take you to the website and it is a nightmare

to find anything. By the time we'd got this far, she was told they had run out of GBIS!"

(Rossendale)

Eligibility criteria for government funding schemes

The majority of projects found the eligibility criteria to be challenging either because the criteria appeared to change in their local area or because it just did not seem to work for the housing stock and / or customers in their area.

- **Several projects reported examples of changes to eligibility criteria;** customers that they had advised who appeared eligible for funding, but once the application had been submitted the funding had run out or the eligibility criteria had changed which meant the customer was no longer able to access funding. This led to LEAD customers being confused, frustrated and reluctant to engage with advice in the future. There are several factors associated with this, cited by projects:
    - The criteria for ECO4 and GBIS changed since they were launched / within the timescale for LEAD delivery.
    - Installers not wanting to undertake the works.
    - For ECO4, where the funding available for certain criteria have 'run out' (likely at a supplier level, not at a global level), based on how suppliers have chosen to meet their commitment.

    "The main challenge has been eligibility for ECO4. I just feel like they're unfairly impinging people just based off the lifting-up criteria that is basically implemented around the EPC, it's just arbitrary." (GMCA)

    "We've been completely reliant on HUG, ECO and GBIS. And people's eligibility for those is a big barrier. Someone might be eligible for that on paper, and their home might be eligible, but then actually when the utility company look at it, it's not worth it for them financially." (NTCA)

- **Some projects suggested that large proportions of their residents would have a household income over the threshold for funding** (e.g. Basingstoke, Surrey) because of the socio-demographic characteristics of their area. Further, BVSC reported that customers living in inter-generational households were usually ineligible for funding because of the combined household income being over the threshold for funding, however they still lacked the disposable income to self-fund measures. There was a suggestion that the current eligibility criteria are not fair for all customers wanting to install measures.

    "There are a lot of people who are falling between the grant eligibility criteria, which I think is…if you're on benefits, you're eligible and if you're not on benefits, you're not eligible. It is too blunt an instrument; a lot of people who are working, working part time or have kids, I was surprised by the number of people in Surrey who are in fuel poverty. One example; A family who although they work, could not afford to have the heating on, they were

freezing cold, their EPC was a D, but they were not eligible for funding." (Surrey)

The example below highlights a view held by some customers who are keen to install measures but need financial assistance to proceed:

Ethnographic case study, Plymouth (Sam)

Customer

Sam moved into their home four years ago. They learned the house is too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. They moved out so they can do a whole house refurbishment which includes floor and wall insulation, new doors and windows, and an air source heat pump. The couple want to make the most of doing a whole-house refurbishment. It creates an opportunity to look at every aspect of energy use and for major changes to the building fabric and its layout.

Advice

The adviser provided them with reassurance about the work they had already done, advised that installing solar would be the next step, but that they would not be eligible for funding. Sam was disappointed as they have a neighbour who has had funded solar installed.

"…we were a little put off [solar] by the price and the fact there are no grants available to us. We are a working household but as we are not in receipt of any benefits and even though we are not high earners there is no assistance available to us…… we would need to save thousands to make the install possible. I feel younger people are more open to changes around renewable energy but are being penalised for working by having no grant access."

- **Some projects suggested that some of their housing stock was ineligible for funding**. This includes WYCA who reported that the eligibility criteria meant that most of their housing stock (e.g. terraced, back-to-back, solid brick) was ineligible for funding (see WYCA case study below.)

3.4.5.3 Availability of installers

- Multiple projects (e.g. CSE Wiltshire, GMCA, North of Tyne and Plymouth) mentioned **a lack of local installers** (for a variety of measures). This means for some measures there were no installers or a lack of choice for customers. This compounds the issue with funded schemes; where there are few installers that are in demand they can be selective about which measures they want to install under each scheme. This was a significant issue in GMCA due to the scale they were working at, pushing thousands of customers through their eligibility checker, without installer capacity to support this. To

mitigate this GMCA set up joint meetings with local partners and installers to agree mutual priorities.

- Some projects found it **challenging to provide the type of support that customers need and want relating to the supply chain,** such as:
    - Recommendations of reliable, quality assured installers, which was not within the LEADs remit. Signposting to Trustmark / MCS was not sufficient for some customers.
    - Help to engage with installers e.g. communicating, keeping up to date with the process.
    - An impartial person to quality assure the work that is conducted.

WYCA

The project engaged ethnic minorities through trusted community leaders and established community groups, and largely provided advice in the advice / group setting.

What worked?

Their community engagement was effective at reaching ethnic minority customers whose first language is not English.

What didn't work?

The project reported that the majority of their customers were not eligible for funding (two out of 1,250 customers advised) as current funding streams:

- Do not cover insulation for solid brick, back-to-back terraced properties
- Are irrelevant for properties with converted loft space, which is common amongst the targeted socio-economic group.
- Have too many restrictions (e.g. related to the size of loft space for GBIS) on the eligibility and the amount of funding that customers can secure.
- Do not cover properties with an EPC rating of C or above, even though the property might be extremely cold to live in and the customer cannot afford to put the heating on.

The project also reported that EcoFlex was not delivered in their local area.

3.4.5.4 Underlying issues with property

Several projects (e.g. Basingstoke, East Lindsey, North of Tyne, Plymouth, Rossendale, and Surrey) were surprised about the state of some of the homes they visited. The state of disrepair means these homes are not suitable for energy efficiency measures. This affected both able to pay customers and customers eligible for funding. In general customers cannot afford to repair their home, and current funding streams do not cover repairs / maintenance.

"There are houses that are in such a poor state of repair that other work needs doing before any retrofit measure can be carried out, and they cannot afford to do them. So that is a massive barrier. There are private landlords not keeping up with repairs. Homeowners who just cannot afford to fix the roof." (Basingstoke)

"I saw a property that would be ideal for attic insulation, but they had a bucket down because it is raining through the roof, so then you need a contractor, a funding stream where the underlying structural issue gets addressed. (Rossendale)

"I've been surprised at the level of deprivation, and the circumstances that so many

Ethnographic case study, Plymouth (Sally)

Customer

Sally is in her 60s and lives on her own. She has had some renovation work done to the house since buying it in 2020. The builder told her she did not have cavity wall insulation or sufficient loft insulation. That prompted her to look for a trusted installer, without success. She was aware of other people who had had experienced issues after having cavity wall insulation installed.

Advice

Sally had a firm idea about what she wanted from the adviser. She found the visit disappointing because the adviser could not give her a list of reputable installers that provide guarantees or are certified. She remains fearful of cavity wall insulation going wrong.

"…cavity wall insulation gets some bad press when it goes wrong. I was aware that if it did go wrong, the cost of actually extracting it was quite significant. And I felt that if I went with a company that had a sort of governing body or insurance or something like that, that I would have an element of protection. But when I tried to find a local installer, I was really struggling."

"I wanted, you know, a reliable company where if anything went wrong, I had some come back and so that's why I got involved."

"I have some practical difficulties. I live on my own. There's a lot of money involved. It's the sort of thing that had my late husband been alive, we would have sat down and talked about. I actually don't have anybody that I can discuss financial things with. And so it falls to me to make all the decisions on my own."

Evaluator reflections

The advice didn't help because it didn't give her the one thing that she wanted.

people are living in. And that is a barrier to them getting any funding because they have huge issues with their property, disrepair, hoarding…" (East Lindsey)

3.4.6 Delivery and management of LEAD

Stakeholders were asked for their views on what they felt had worked well and less well in the set-up, delivery and management of LEAD as a funded project. This not only provides learning for future schemes, but also important context when assessing the performance and impact of LEAD.

3.4.6.1 What worked well?

Role of the Net Zero Hubs

There was general agreement that the overall structure of involving Net Zero Hubs as intermediaries between DESNZ and LEADs was effective. Net Zero Hubs were well placed to understand regional needs, engage with projects directly and support them in navigating delivery processes. Keys to success were:

- Net Zero Hubs developing strong relationships with their LEAD projects in order to a) help projects navigate administration processes (e.g. reporting requirements, forecasting) b) keep them motivated when LEAD projects have found it challenging to meet DESNZ's reporting and administration requirements and / or delays in the process, and c) offer advice on delivery challenges and share ideas from other projects.
- Weekly meetings between Net Zero Hubs and DESNZ enabled Net Zero Hubs as intermediaries to provide effective and timely communications between DESNZ and projects.

Reporting systems

The Net Zero Hubs reported that the introduction of a SharePoint system for reporting improved communications between DESNZ and projects by allowing all parties to access reports simultaneously, reducing unnecessary follow up communication and increasing transparency.

3.4.6.2 What worked less well?

There was general agreement that the start of the programme was not as effective as it could have been, with the following challenges noted:

- Contracting delays at the start of the programme meant that many of the LEADs mobilised later than the planned start date of June 2023, and subsequently some did not start advising customers until late 2023 or early 2024.
- Due to the delays, and staff changes, DESNZ felt there was insufficient planning and preparation before launching the programme. Essential processes and key documentation were not in place when funding was provided to projects, which caused confusion and extra work.

- Some projects cited challenges during set up resulting in slower mobilisation than anticipated. Examples include contracting issues where there were multiple organisations and sub-contractors involved in a consortium, procurement challenges for items such as vehicles, and staff recruitment.
- Some projects found that it took time to generate awareness of their service, and to gain momentum in advising customers. Subsequently, LEAD projects encountered a decline in customer interest in discussing energy efficiency over the summer months.

Net Zero Hubs and some LEADs reported that the close monitoring and scrutiny of KPIs and the cost-per-transaction metric was excessive for a "test and learn" pilot. This deterred projects from:

- Experimenting with approaches to identify and reach hard-to-reach customers. Many projects broadened their target market as a result. Subsequently, some of the project learnings have been diluted.
- Adapting their advice provision to include multiple interactions / follow up support, in favour of providing a larger number of customers with one advice interaction. As a result, further research relating to the effectiveness of various follow up approaches would be useful.

Finally, Net Zero Hubs and projects felt that the timescales of the programme were too short to (a) effectively test and learn approaches and (b) expect customers to have installed measures.

3.5 Value for Money

Value for money (VfM) has been assessed using the 4 Es framework.[68] This approach considers not just how much was spent and what was delivered, but also whether projects achieved meaningful outcomes and did so in a fair and inclusive way. The 4 Es are:

- **Economy** – Were inputs (e.g. staff time, materials) acquired at the right cost and to the right quality?
- **Efficiency** – Were outputs delivered efficiently (relative to costs)?
- **Cost-effectiveness** - Did the project deliver meaningful outcomes relative to its cost
- **Equity** – Did the project reach those most in need and ensure fair access to support?

This approach has been used because it allows for a holistic and proportionate assessment of value-for-money across the diverse LEAD projects. A full cost-benefit analysis was not considered appropriate or feasible in this context, as many of the intended outcomes, such as increased knowledge and confidence, or enhanced capacity to take action, are intangible, long-term, and difficult to monetise reliably. We seek to apply the 4 Es framework in a manner

[68] See Oxford Policy Management (2018) – Approach to assessing value for money for further details.

that reflects the broader social value of the programme, while still examining cost and delivery performance.[69]

3.5.1 Limitations

This value-for-money analysis relies on secondary data collected as part of project monitoring. Due to variation in the interpretation of KPI definitions, and challenges in measuring the number of customers that have gone on to install measures, the data we use may be an imperfect measure of realised outcomes, and comparisons between projects should be treated as indicative rather than definitive.

3.5.2 Economy

The Economy assessment considers whether projects acquired and used resources at an appropriate cost and quality, and whether they managed those costs effectively over the course of delivery.

A key limitation in assessing Economy is that the monitoring data collected for individual projects is not broken down by different categories of spend, such as staffing, marketing, equipment, or overheads. This means it is not possible to systematically scrutinise or compare how different projects allocated resources across different activities. As a result, the evaluation relies mainly on evidence from qualitative interviews with DESNZ, Net Zero Hubs, and project delivery teams. The section is structured around the key findings from these interviews.

While application forms required a breakdown of costs, they did not ask applicants to justify the basis for these costs or explain how they would ensure resources were acquired at the lowest reasonable cost. Projects were asked to provide budgets by category, but the form did not require them to explain the basis for unit costs such as salaries, overheads, or marketing expenditure. As a result, there was no consistent expectation at the application stage that projects would demonstrate how they had sought to achieve value for money when planning their budgets. In interviews, some project teams did give examples of how they sought to minimise costs, such as benchmarking salary costs against local authority or charity sector norms (several projects) using existing internal resources (YES Energy Solutions), reusing equipment (Testlands bought second-hand devices), or the use of volunteers to delivery energy efficiency advice (Rossendale, Surrey CC), but these examples came from individual practice rather than being a consistent expectation or requirement at the point of application.

Cost scrutiny by DESNZ and the Net Zero Hubs was applied consistently, with all projects assessed and discussed in terms of overall cost and value for money. A part of this process involved identifying a benchmark of approximately £1000 per transaction, derived from analysis across the portfolio. Projects with costs above this threshold were subject to additional scrutiny to understand whether there were specific factors—such as complexity or scale —that justified the higher cost. While some Hubs, such as the South East, reported negotiating budget reductions (e.g. reducing Community Energy South's staffing budget by 20% and

reallocating funds), others noted that clearer guidance from DESNZ on acceptable cost parameters (e.g. staffing, overheads) could have supported more consistent decision-making across regions. For example, the North West Hub suggested that tighter expectations might have improved consistency.

There was also evidence that similar scrutiny was applied within projects themselves, particularly in cases where delivery involved sub-contractors or consortia arrangements. For example, GMCA and Surrey County Council both monitored the budgets of their delivery partners closely and required justification for any proposed changes.

DESNZ's monitoring and oversight of expenditure during project delivery has been robust and has ensured ongoing value for money. During delivery, DESNZ required projects to submit quarterly grant claims and updated financial forecasts. These were reviewed by DESNZ staff to check actual expenditure against approved budgets, and to identify any variances. Where change requests were submitted, for example, to reprofile budgets or shift expenditure between categories, DESNZ scrutinised the requests, assessing whether the changes were justified and whether the revised spending plans continued to offer good value for money. Interviewees from DESNZ noted that they actively challenged projects through this process, questioning whether requested funds were necessary based on updated activity forecasts, and seeking to ensure that funding remained proportionate to delivery. For example, if a project proposed to engage fewer customers than originally forecast, DESNZ queried whether the associated costs should also be reduced. This has provided an important safeguard against inefficiencies developing during the lifetime of projects.

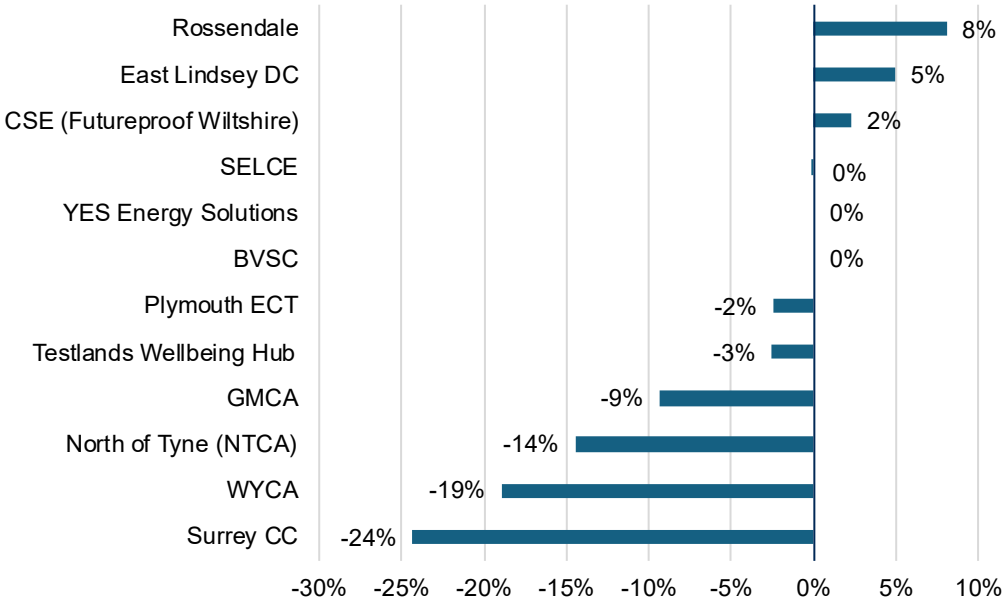
Monitoring data suggests this scrutiny has helped projects maintain good control over costs. Figure 18 shows that, for almost all case study projects, actual expenditure has been close to or below the original approved budget. The only projects which went over-budget (5% or more) were those in Rossendale and East Lindsey. In the case of Rossendale, this may be explained by the fact that the project originally intended to engage residents using an app (the Fairer Warmth app). However, they found this was not effective as an engagement tool and switched to a more resource intensive, face-to-face approach, resulting in higher costs. Across the programme, the data suggests that projects have generally been effective in managing their budgets and avoiding significant overspends, and the quarterly monitoring activity outlined above has been effective.

3.5.3 Efficiency

The Efficiency assessment examines whether a high volume and quality of advice was delivered relative to the costs incurred.

The main indicator for measuring efficiency is the average cost per household advised (widely referred to as the "cost-per-transaction" by interviewees). This indicator divides the total costs incurred during delivery by the number of households advised – using the agreed KPI 1 definition. Figure 19 overleaf shows that cost-per-transaction varies significantly across case study projects, ranging from £79 in Basingstoke and Deane to £807 in North of Tyne.

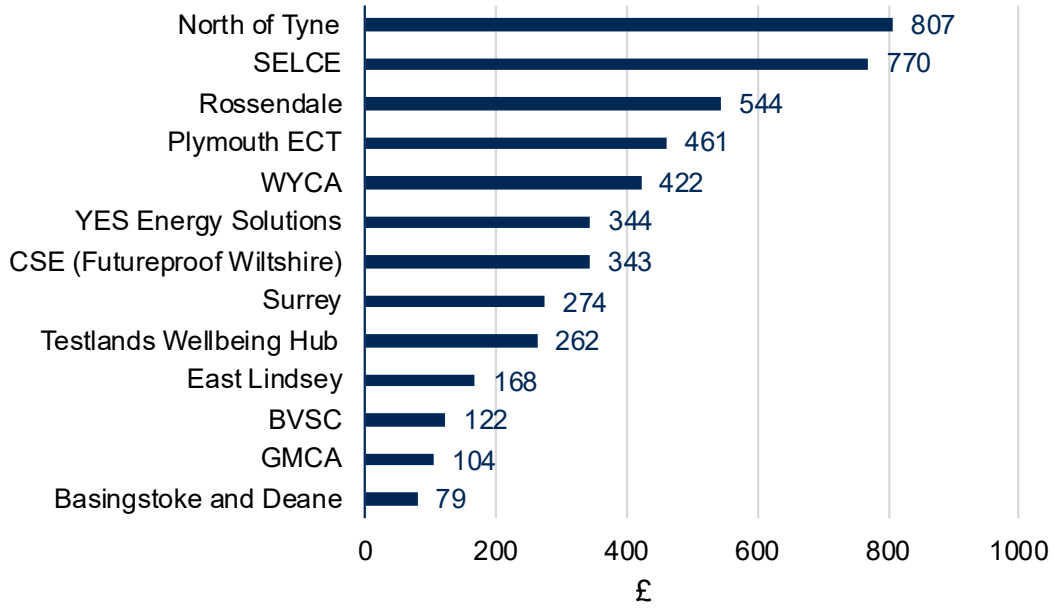
Figure 17: Actual expenditure as a percentage of original budget



Source: DESNZ monitoring data. Differences in reported underspend may reflect project-level change control requests or internal reallocations within regional hubs.

The average cost-per-transaction for these projects was £362, which is significantly lower than the average for all projects (£639), which suggests the case study projects were, on average, delivered more efficiently than other LEAD projects in the portfolio.

Figure 18: Cost-per-transaction for case study projects



Source: DESNZ monitoring data

However, this cannot be interpreted as a straightforward indication of the relative value-for-money of the different projects. Projects' approaches to advice delivery were so different that meaningful comparison is difficult.

Furthermore, LEAD projects applied different interpretations of what constitutes a household receiving in-person advice (KPI 1). Some only count households who received a home visit or similar towards KPI 1, while others count any in-person advice, including brief interactions at events. This variability means that the same KPI may reflect fundamentally different levels of input and support across projects, making direct value-for-money comparisons based on this measure challenging at best, and misleading at worst.

Table 13 below categorises LEAD projects into three broad groups - low, medium, and high intensity - based on the nature of support they reported providing to households. This classification draws on evidence gathered through qualitative interviews, including how projects defined and applied KPI 1 (households provided with in-person advice), and the reported proportion of advice interactions that involved home visits or similar in-depth support.

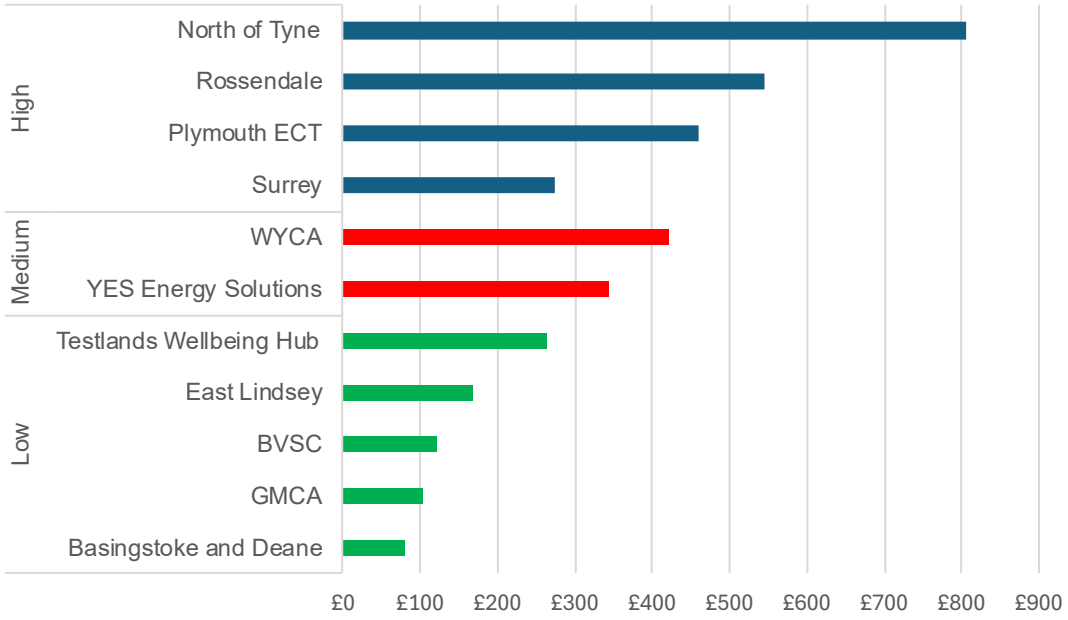
It is important to note that this classification is indicative and, to some degree, subjective. Project delivery models varied considerably, and there may be significant variation within each category depending on local context and the delivery model.

Table 14: Categorisation of projects for evaluating Efficiency

Average KPI 1 intensity	Description	Examples
Low	Projects which engaged large numbers of people primarily through events and drop-in sessions, often counting any form of face-to-face interaction as an output. While these could include useful one-to-one conversations or information sessions, relatively few households received more intensive support such as a home visit or survey (less than 20%).	• BVSC • GMCA • East Lindsey District Council • Basingstoke • Testlands
Medium	Offered a mix of engagement types including events, telephone advice, and home visits, all of which could count as in-person advice, and where a moderate proportion of households (20-50%) received more tailored support such as a home visit.	• WYCA • YES Energy Solutions
High	Projects in which a large proportion of households received a home visit or survey (>50%), OR which applied a stricter definition of in-person advice counting only those who received a full home visit, energy assessment or similar.	• NTCA • Plymouth • Rossendale • Surrey

Note: It was not possible to categorise all case study projects due to a lack of evidence (e.g. interviewees could not provide an estimate of the proportion of outputs which were home visits)

Figure 19: Cost per transaction for LEAD projects grouped by intensity category



Source: DESNZ monitoring data

Note: it was not possible to categorise all case study projects due to a lack of evidence, so not all are shown.

Figure 19 shows the cost per transaction for a selection of LEAD projects, grouped by the intensity of support provided. As expected, projects offering high-intensity support tend to have higher costs per transaction. This is intuitive and reflects the greater resources required to deliver more tailored, labour-intensive services. However, it tells us little about the relative efficiency of the projects.

That said, it is possible to make the following observations:

- **Surrey County Council's** project appears to have performed particularly well. Nearly all their KPI 1 outputs were reported to be home visits, with each one accompanied by a written report. This suggests a high-intensity model, yet they achieved a cost per transaction of just £280, which was lower than medium-intensity projects and comparable with some low-intensity projects. This strong performance may be explained by the fact the project used "Energy Champions" (trained volunteers) to conduct the home visits and deliver face-to-face advice, which is likely to have substantially lowered unit costs.[70]
- Although **Basingstoke and Deane** is classified as a low-intensity project, the project team indicated that 18% of their outputs involved a home energy survey or retrofit assessment, which is much higher-intensity than some other projects in this category (where fewer than 5% of outputs involved a home visit). Despite this, Basingstoke and Deane achieved a cost per transaction of only £30 which was the lowest of any case

[70] While the use of trained volunteers appears to have helped reduce delivery costs, there are questions about the sustainability and scalability of this model. Project stakeholders noted variability in the time taken by different volunteers to conduct assessments and prepare reports, which could pose challenges for consistency and replication at scale.

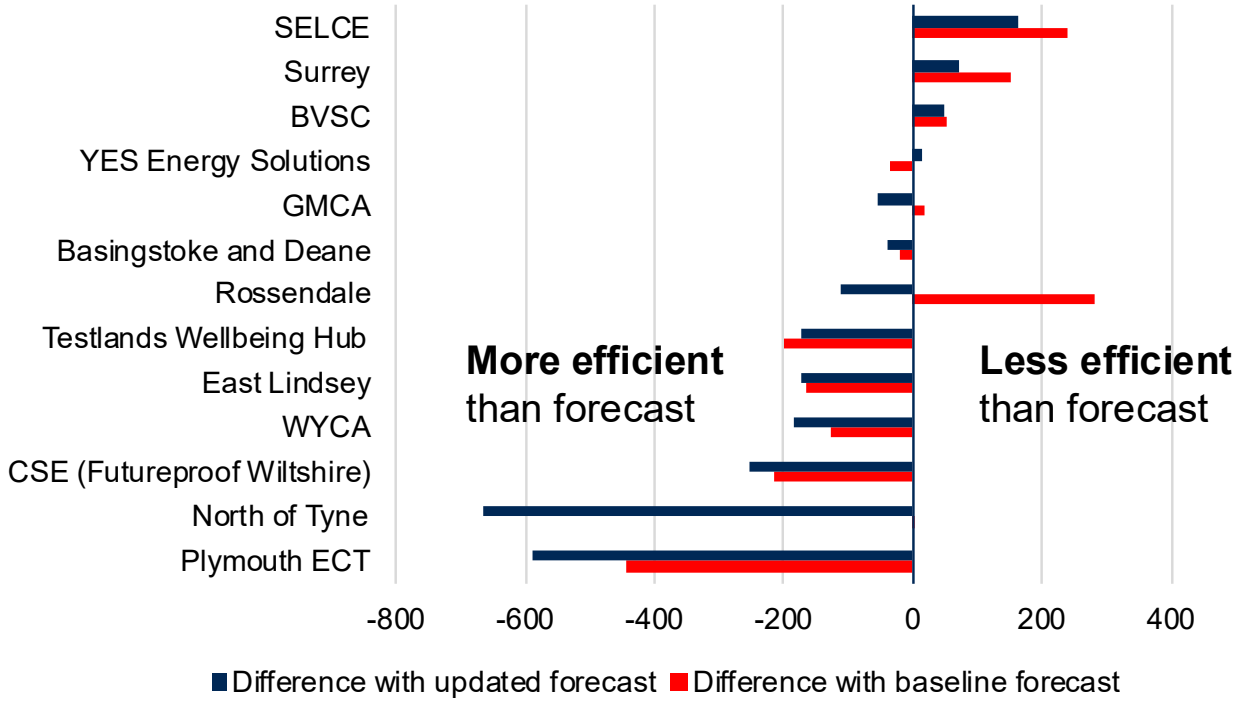
study project. This strong performance could be explained by their use of 'thermify' home surveys (which accounted for 600 of their 3,410 outputs). These low-cost home energy assessments use thermal imaging technology to detect heat loss. These reportedly only cost £45 per survey, including automated report generation, which reduces staff time and means home visits can be conducted very efficiently.

An important caveat is that both projects operated in relatively affluent areas, and appear to have supported fewer HTR consumers. This may have contributed to a lower cost per transaction, with customers more responsive to engagement and facing fewer barriers.

Although comparing efficiency across projects is challenging due to differences in delivery models and definitions of outputs, we can still gain insights into efficiency by examining how each project performed against its own original forecasts. This provides an indication of whether projects delivered their planned activities at the expected level of efficiency.

Again, some caution is needed when interpreting these findings. Although some projects reported that their original output forecasts were based on past experiences, many acknowledged that their estimates were speculative and not grounded in detailed evidence or modelling, or they were based on experience of delivering advice to a general audience rather than hard-to-reach and hard-to-decarbonise households. In practice, many projects adapted their delivery models as they learned what engagement methods worked best. To reflect this (and the delays to projects starting which led many to revise their forecasts), cost-per-

Figure 20: Comparison of actual cost-per-transaction with forecasts



Source: DESNZ monitoring data. Note: actual cost per transaction has been compared to two forecasts. The "baseline forecast" refers to the original forecast for each project and is calculated by dividing the baseline spend by baseline outputs (KPI1). The "updated forecast" refers to the most recent forecast for each project and divides forecast spend by forecast outputs.

transaction has also been compared against updated forecasts provided by projects during delivery, which are likely to better represent their revised expectations.

The results in Figure 21 show that most case study projects have been more efficient than both their original forecast and the updated forecasts. This suggests that many projects were able to control costs effectively and deliver more transactions for less than anticipated.

3.5.4 Cost-effectiveness

The purpose of the cost-effectiveness analysis is to explore the extent to which LEAD projects expenditure has generated the desired outcomes; specifically, the extent to which project spending has resulted in measurable progress towards action on improved readiness to install retrofit or energy efficiency measures.

Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of LEAD projects is inherently complex due to significant differences in delivery models, target populations, and data quality across the portfolio. Projects varied widely in their intensity of support, scale, and focus. These differences affect both the cost per household advised and the types of outcomes that can reasonably be expected. Compounding this, there are limitations in the available data: survey responses are unlikely to be representative of all households supported; often skewed toward those who received more intensive support. As a result, a purely quantitative comparison would risk misleading conclusions.

To support a more meaningful and fair assessment of cost-effectiveness, the analysis divides LEAD projects into three groups based on the proportion of survey respondents classified as hard-to-reach: (1) projects with a lower proportion (0–30%), (2) projects with a mixed customer base (30–60%), and (3) projects with a higher proportion (over 60%). This grouping recognises that achieving outcomes is generally more challenging when working with HTR households.

Within each group, the analysis considers (i) the cost per household advised (KPI1) (ii) the strength of evidence on outcomes achieved (drawing on survey data), and (iii) the extent to which survey responses are representative of households supported. This supports a nuanced understanding of cost-effectiveness while acknowledging key data limitations.

Group 1: Lower proportion of hard-to-reach households

This group includes projects where less than 30% of survey respondents were classified as hard-to-reach (Surrey County Council, Basingstoke and Deane and SELCE). Key information to evaluate cost-effectiveness is presented in Table 14.

Statistically significant differences from the pooled average are highlighted in red (below average) or green (above average).

Based on the above, the evaluation has drawn the following conclusions:

- **Surrey County Council** appears to be the strongest overall performer in this group,

Table 15: Cost-effectiveness analysis for Group 1

	Surrey (n=84)	Basingstoke & Deane (n=61)	SELCE (n=59)
% hard-to-reach	18%	26%	27%
% hard-to-decarbonise	56%	39%	64%
Cost per transaction	£280	£30	£755
Representativeness of survey	Good	Poor	Unknown*
% decided to install retrofit measures	45%	33%	29%
% applying for gov scheme	37%	17%↓	54%↑
% understanding of measures improved	74%↑	49%↓	56%
% increased confidence in retrofit measures	65%↑	33%↓	46%
% more confident in navigating retrofit process	56%↑	22%↓	39%

Source: Consumer survey. As it was not possible to interview stakeholders from SELCE, meaning it was not possible to compare the percentage of survey-respondents who had a home visit with the percentage reported by the project.

achieving the highest outcome scores across a range of indicators, including understanding, confidence, and readiness to act. It also has a moderate cost per transaction (£280) and survey responses that appear broadly representative of the wider group of households supported. This suggests that Surrey delivered strong outcomes at a reasonable cost, making it a well-rounded and cost-effective project within this category.

- **SELCE** stands out for its success in encouraging households to apply for government funding schemes, with 54% of respondents reporting they had applied or intended to apply - the highest across the group. However, it also had by far the highest cost per transaction (£755), and the representativeness of the survey responses is unknown, making it difficult to assess whether the outcomes reported reflect the broader group of households supported. Even if the survey responses were broadly representative, the significantly higher cost per household advised means it is unlikely that SELCE would match the cost-effectiveness of Surrey, which achieved stronger or comparable outcomes at less than half the cost. While the project may have delivered meaningful impact in a specific area, the evidence does not currently support a conclusion of strong overall cost-effectiveness.
- **Basingstoke and Deane** achieved lower outcome scores overall, particularly on softer outcomes such as confidence and understanding. However, the cost per transaction was extremely low (£30), suggesting it delivered impact at a very low unit cost. That said, the survey responses are clearly unrepresentative, with a disproportionately high number of respondents reporting a home visit compared to the overall household population. This limits confidence in the reported outcomes. While the proportion who

reported deciding to install retrofit measures (33%) is relatively high given the cost, strong caveats apply to any effectiveness or value-for-money claims due to the lack of representativeness.

Group 2: Mixed customer base

This group of projects worked with a mixed customer base, where between a third and half of survey respondents were classified as hard-to-reach. While this places them in a broadly comparable category, the range from 33% to 50% still means there is significant variation in delivery context and consumer needs, which likely influenced both outcomes and costs.

Table 16: Cost-effectiveness analysis for Group 2

	Plymouth ECT (n=74)	GMCA (n=137)	North of Tyne (n=108)
% hard-to-reach	33%	36%	50%
% hard-to-decarbonise	69%	62%	74%
Cost per transaction	£491	£104	£807
Representativeness of survey	Poor	Poor	Good
% decided to install retrofit measures	39%	33%	28%
% applying for gov scheme	34%	22%	30%
% understanding of measures improved	62%↑	34%↓	47%
% increased confidence in retrofit measures	50%↑	32%	35%
% more confident in navigating retrofit process	41%↑	26%	29%

Source: Consumer survey

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reach clear and definitive conclusions about cost-effectiveness for this group due to differences between projects and limitations in the available data:

- **Plymouth ECT** achieved the highest outcome scores in this group across nearly all indicators, including understanding, confidence, and decisions to install measures. While the cost per transaction is relatively high (£491), these results suggest that, if survey responses were representative, Plymouth ECT would likely represent a strong return on investment. However, the survey sample appears skewed toward more intensively supported households, which limits confidence in the results.
- **GMCA** had the lowest cost per transaction in this group (£104) but also recorded the weakest outcome scores across most indicators. Moreover, these results are likely overstated, as the survey responses are not representative of the wider group of households supported. While the partnership with B&Q appears to have been an effective way to encourage uptake of measures among DIY-oriented consumers, the overall impact of the project is difficult to assess. The low delivery cost is notable, but

the lack of robust and representative outcome data means that firm conclusions about cost-effectiveness cannot be drawn.

- **North of Tyne** had the highest cost per transaction (£807) of any LEAD project, yet its outcome scores were moderate. However, we are more confident in the accuracy of the survey data, with good alignment between reported and actual home visits. The project also worked with the highest proportion of hard-to-reach households in this group (50%), which may partly explain more modest outcomes. While the high cost raises questions, the project may still represent a contextually justified investment given its focus on more vulnerable groups. Nonetheless, the value for money is difficult to determine with confidence.

Group 3: Higher proportion of hard-to-reach households

This group worked with the most challenging customer base, with over 60% of survey respondents classified as hard-to-reach.

Table 17: Cost-effectiveness analysis for projects with a focus on HTR households

	BVSC (n=65)	East Lindsey (n=123)	WYCA (n=91)	YES Energy Solutions (n=70)
% hard-to-reach	64%	63%	68%	60%
% hard-to-decarbonise	69%	74%	67%	63%
Cost per transaction	£122	£168	£422	£344
Representativeness of survey	Unclear	Poor	Poor	Unclear
% decided to install retrofit measures	9%↓	33%↑	9%↓	30%↑
% applying for gov scheme	38%	40%↑	13%↓	22%
% understanding of measures improved	37%	40%	32%	53%↑
% increased confidence in retrofit measures	37%	33%	34%	43%
% more confident in navigating retrofit process	35%	20%↓	24%	41%↑

Source: Consumer survey

The main conclusions are as follows:

- **BVSC** had the lowest cost per transaction (£122) and achieved moderate scores across most outcomes, including relatively high rates of households applying for government funding (38%). However, it scored joint lowest for households deciding to install measures (9%). The representativeness of the survey data is unclear meaning the true outcomes may be lower (although this is also the case for other projects in this group). Overall, BVSC appears to have delivered reasonable reach and support at low cost, and has been one of the most cost-effective in this group at supporting households to apply

for government schemes, although further evidence on the representativeness of the survey would be needed to confirm this.

- **East Lindsey** achieved the highest outcome in this group for households deciding to install measures (33%) and the highest share applying for government schemes (40%). While it performed less strongly on softer outcomes such as confidence and understanding, these two harder outcomes suggest tangible progress along the retrofit journey. The survey data is known to overrepresent households who received a home visit, meaning the reported outcomes are likely to be somewhat inflated. However, with a cost per transaction of £168, East Lindsey appears to have been cost-effective in delivering specific outcomes, particularly in supporting households to take action and access funding. That said, further evidence would be needed to confirm its cost-effectiveness.
- **WYCA** had the highest cost per transaction (£422) in this group and recorded the lowest or second-lowest outcomes across all indicators, including very low rates of households deciding to install measures (9%) or applying for government funding (13%). Survey data is not representative, with a clear overrepresentation of households receiving home visits. Given the high cost and poor outcomes, WYCA performs poorly on both effectiveness and cost-effectiveness within this group.
- **YES Energy Solutions** achieved the strongest overall performance in this group across most indicators, with high scores for understanding, confidence, and navigating the retrofit process. While the percentage applying for government schemes was lower (22%), this may reflect differences in this project's focus and delivery model. Although the survey data may be skewed toward more intensively supported households, the consistently high scores across softer outcomes suggest the project delivered impactful support to a challenging customer group. At a moderate cost per transaction (£344), YES Energy appears to have provided good value relative to others in this group.

In summary, based on the available evidence, we can draw the following conclusions about cost-effectiveness:

- **Projects with strong evidence of cost-effectiveness include Surrey County Council and YES Energy Solutions**. Surrey delivered consistently high outcomes at a moderate cost, with survey responses judged to be broadly representative. YES Energy achieved high scores across most outcome indicators, despite working with a hard-to-reach population, and did so at a reasonable cost, although further confirmation of survey representativeness would strengthen this conclusion.
- **Projects with limited evidence of cost-effectiveness include WYCA and SELCE**. WYCA had the highest cost in its group and weak outcomes across all indicators, while SELCE also had the highest cost per transaction in its group and, although strong in encouraging government scheme uptake, cannot demonstrate sufficient value across a broader set of outcomes to justify its cost.
- **Projects with some evidence of cost-effectiveness but requiring further validation include East Lindsey, BVSC, Plymouth ECT, and North of Tyne**. These projects

showed promising results in specific areas; for example, East Lindsey in supporting installation decisions, and BVSC in encouraging take-up of government schemes, but limitations in the representativeness of outcome data make it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Plymouth ECT and North of Tyne also showed potential but either had high costs or issues with data quality that constrain confidence in their cost-effectiveness.

3.5.5 Equity

This section assesses the extent to which LEAD projects successfully reached and supported households that typically face greater barriers to retrofit and energy efficiency; particularly those who are vulnerable, digitally excluded, or on low incomes.

LEAD projects were intended to complement the digital and phoneline services by providing in-person advice to those who wouldn't normally be reached, including digitally excluded and vulnerable consumer and support hard-to-decarbonise homes. As such, the LEAD programme was designed to address both equity of access (who gets support) and equity of housing conditions (which homes are supported).

This section focuses primarily on the equity of access dimension. This is because the types of homes supported varied considerably across project areas, reflecting local housing stock, making it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons across projects on this dimension. It explores:

- Which types of households were reached by the LEAD projects.
- The extent to which support was tailored to meet the needs of harder-to-reach groups.
- Whether these groups experienced comparable outcomes to other consumers.

Which types of households were reached by LEAD projects?

Table 17 uses the survey data to describe the characteristics of households supported by LEAD projects across a range of criteria. Statistically significant differences are highlighted in green and red. As reported in section 3.3.3, the evidence suggests that the programme has successfully engaged hard-to-reach, digitally excluded, and vulnerable households.

The only indicator where representation falls below the national average is the proportion of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, this may reflect the demographic makeup of the areas served by many LEAD projects, which often have relatively small ethnic minority populations. Notably, a high proportion of respondents in BVSC (62%) and WYCA (46%) identified as being from an ethnic minority background, aligning with the more diverse populations in those urban areas.

However, this comparison should be treated with caution. While we know the survey responses are not fully representative of the types of support received (over-representing households that received more intensive engagement) it is also possible that they are not fully

representative of the broader characteristics of all households supported through the programme.

The table highlights substantial variation between LEAD projects in the types of households they engaged based on survey data:

- The projects in Surrey and Basingstoke and Deane primarily engaged older households, particularly those aged 65 and over, but reached relatively low proportions of other vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups. Only 18% and 26% of households met the strict definition of hard-to-reach.
- BVSC and WYCA focused more on younger, working-age households, with particularly high engagement among ethnic minority communities and households where no adults are in full-time employment (potentially including student households).
- Several projects have a high proportion of respondents with a disability, notably East Lindsey and WYCA, as well as SELCE, YES Energy, BVSC, GMCA, and North of Tyne. This may reflect targeted efforts to reach these groups, who are more likely to be eligible for government support schemes.
- A number of projects also appear to have targeted low-income households who are also more likely to be eligible for support. This was most evident in YES Energy and North of Tyne, but also apparent in BVSC and East Lindsey.
- A high proportion of households in Plymouth (21%), BVSC (21%) and East Lindsey (19%) had no internet access, possibly indicating some success in engaging digitally excluded households, although the differences were not statistically significant.

These findings suggest equity in reach was not consistent across the programme. Some projects reached more disadvantaged consumers, while others were less targeted or more likely to engage easier-to-reach and able to pay customers.

Was support tailored to meet the needs of hard-to-reach groups?

There is clear qualitative evidence that many LEAD projects made a concerted effort to tailor their delivery models and advice to the varying needs of hard-to-reach groups (see section 3.3). While the level and nature of support may have varied, several projects adapted their approach to improve accessibility, provide more intensive and personalised advice, and build trust with vulnerable households who face greater barriers to retrofit.

Did hard-to-reach groups experience comparable outcomes to other consumers?

Survey evidence suggests that a lower proportion of hard-to-reach consumers reported positive outcomes. Two projects consistently bucked this trend, although in most cases, the sample sizes were too small to detect statistically significant differences:

- **North of Tyne**: hard-to-reach consumers were more likely to state that they had decided to install retrofit measures (statistically significant), that they had greater

Table 18: Characteristics of survey respondents by LEAD project

	At least one person aged over 65	No household member under 65 in full employment	At least one person with a disability	Ethnic minority households	Gross household income under £30,000	No internet access at home	Hard-to-reach (broad definition)	Hard-to-reach (strict definition)
Basingstoke and Deane (n=61)	52%	13%	18%↓	12%	13%↓	11%	85%	26%
BVSC (n=65)	29%	46%↑	42%	62%↑	35%	21%	96%	64%
East Lindsey (n=123)	63%↑	28%	61%↑	0%↓	33%	19%	95%	63%
GMCA (n=137)	35%	16%	44%	10%	25%	10%	76%	36%
North of Tyne (n=108)	58%↑	18%	42%	4%	40%↑	11%	83%	50%
Plymouth ECT (n=74)	50%	10%↓	25%	1%↓	29%	21%	74%	33%
SELCE (n=59)	38%	14%	41%	25%	20%	18%	64%	27%
Surrey (n=84)	33%	14%	14%↓	10%	10%↓	7%	61%	18%↓
WYCA (n=91)	29%↓	46%↑	55%↑	46%↑	30%	16%	93%	68%↑
YES Energy Solutions (n=70)	28%↓	24%	46%	25%	43%↑	15%	83%	60%
NET	**43%**	**23%**	**40%**	**17%**	**29%**	**15%**	**82%**	**45%**
England average	29%	Not available	32%	25%	20 to 30%*	4%	Not available	Not available

Source: LEAD customer survey

*ONS data shows a household income of £30,000 is between the 2nd and 3rd decile for households in the UK.

Note: Green figures indicate a percentage that is statistically significantly higher than the average; red figures indicate a percentage that is significantly lower.

confidence in these measures and in navigating the retrofit process (not statistically significant).

- **SELCE**: hard-to-reach consumers were more likely to report improved understanding of the retrofit measures that were suitable for their property and increased confidence in the effectiveness of these measures (both statistically significant). They were also more likely to report improved confidence in navigating the retrofit process (not statistically significant).

Table 19: Comparison of reported outcomes for hard-to-reach and non hard-to-reach groups

	Non hard-to-reach (n=425)	Hard-to-reach (n=402)
Decided to install measures	33%↑	25%↓
Applying or intending to apply for gov schemes	26%	26%
Improved understanding of relevant measures	52%↑	40%↓
Increased confidence in effectiveness of measures	42%	36%
More confident about navigating the retrofit process	28%	24%

Source: Consumer survey

3.5.6 Conclusions on value for money

The evidence indicates that the LEAD projects covered by this evaluation delivered good value for money overall. Most projects were delivered within budget, achieved meaningful outcomes, and reached priority groups, demonstrating that local energy advice can be provided efficiently and inclusively. That said, there was variation among projects, and in many cases, there are several data limitations that make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the relative value for money delivered by several projects:

- **Economy**: Project spending was well controlled, with most projects delivered within or under budget and effective financial oversight provided during delivery. However, a lack of consistent scrutiny of cost assumptions at the application stage meant that expectations around economy varied, and some opportunities to reduce costs may have been missed.
- **Efficiency**: Many projects converted expenditure into outputs efficiently, including some of those delivering intensive, face-to-face support (e.g. Surrey). However, variation in delivery models, recording practices, and definitions of outputs makes it difficult to assess efficiency on a consistent basis or compare performance directly across projects.
- **Cost-effectiveness**: Some projects achieved strong outcomes at reasonable cost, including some of those working with hard-to-reach groups (e.g. YES Energy

Solutions). Others delivered positive outcomes but at disproportionately high cost or showed promise in specific areas without demonstrating clear value across a broader set of outcomes. Inconsistent definitions and outcome data quality mean that cost-effectiveness can only be assessed confidently for a small number of projects.

- **Equity**: The programme performed well in reaching digitally excluded and vulnerable groups, with strong engagement of older people, low-income households, and those without internet access. While this didn't necessarily lead to subsequent action, this reflects additional barriers they face. Notably, projects such as North of Tyne and SELCE demonstrated that tailored support can enable hard-to-reach households to achieve outcomes equal to or better than other groups.

3.6 LEAD Conclusions

3.6.1 Has LEAD successfully engaged hard-to-reach customers and customers living in hard-to-decarbonise homes?

Projects were successful at reaching and engaging customers within the broad definition of hard-to-reach customers and hard-to-decarbonise homes through:

1. **Attending a wide range of events and community groups in-person**; this has enabled projects to reach customers who would not otherwise have engaged with energy efficiency advice, although it should be acknowledged that in-person engagement approaches are resource intensive.
    - Hard-to-reach customers are less likely to respond to written communications e.g. leaflets / direct mail. They fear scams, are unsure who to trust, are overwhelmed with 'junk' mail and some find it challenging to understand written material and whether it is applicable to them.
    - Instead, a friendly and approachable adviser, in-person, can start a conversation with a customer and introduce and tailor the topic of energy efficiency to the customer, picking up on visual and behavioural cues.
    - The adviser could flex their language to resonate with the specific customer. Projects found that a combination of different messages (e.g. warm homes, comfortable homes, saving money, saving energy, reducing mould and damp) to be effective. In contrast, the term 'retrofit' was ineffective as customers do not understand what it means.
    - Attending events / groups that the customer already planned to attend makes it more convenient for customers; they do not have to go out of their way.
    - Delivering advice in familiar, local, settings put customers at ease. Customers also perceive that the group has 'endorsed; the advice and therefore have greater trust in it.

- This approach is even more effective when the advisers are local themselves and embedded in the local community as customers can relate to them and, as a result, trust what is being said.

2. **Direct marketing;** Examples include:
    - The use of demographic and EPC data to target middle income households through a letter or leaflet offering a free home survey.
    - Targeted text messages from GPs to patients with health conditions who could be eligible for funding for measures.
    - Including promotional materials alongside trusted communications e.g. including a leaflet alongside annual council tax letters.

However, digital tools to attract hard-to-reach customers were found to be ineffective.

3.6.2 What difference has LEAD made to customers?

LEAD advice has been effective in moving some, but not all customers along the customer journey to the installation of energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation measures.

The projects have been more effective at making a difference to customers in the earlier part of the customer journey for example increasing customer understanding of potential measures they could install compared to later steps in the customer journey such as confidence to install, deciding to install and engaging with installers.

Projects have also supported customers to access government funding schemes to support the cost of measures, increasing the volume of customers accessing schemes such as GBIS, HUG and ECO. Projects achieved this through:

- Targeting potential customers who might be eligible for funding e.g. using existing demographic / EPC data, attending events / groups aimed specifically at certain groups.
- Raising awareness that funding for measures is available.
- Reassuring customers that the funding is legitimate, and not a scam.
- Checking the customer's eligibility for funding, sometimes using their own eligibility checking tool.
- In some cases, viewing the home to check the measures eligible for funding would be suitable for the home and customers.
- Encouraging customers to apply now, rather than 'wait until later'.
- Supporting the customer to complete the application in whole or in part.
- Helping customers access evidence required to support their application e.g. letters from the GP outlining health conditions.

The programme has also led to wider benefits and outcomes beyond the remit of LEAD, adding value to customers through:

- Providing energy saving advice (e.g. behavioural changes, adjusting boiler settings etc) and items to keep customers warm (e.g. draught proof tape, draught excluders) or items to reduce costs (e.g. energy saving light bulbs, shower timers).
- Providing advice and referrals leading to health, social and well-being outcomes e.g. through helping customers resolve energy debts, supporting customers using fuel vouchers or referring to food banks, referring to well-being support, support for hoarding, adapting the home where the customer faces mobility and / or health issues.

3.6.3 What approaches are most effective at moving customers along the retrofit journey?

The test and learn approaches evidence that different models of advice can be effective at moving customers through the customer journey, and importantly that a one size fits all approach is not effective in doing so. Effectiveness will depend on the type of advice, the type of customer, and the extent to which they are hard-to-reach.

In general, approaches that were more in-depth, whilst costing more to deliver, have led to better outcomes. The following aspects were found to be most effective in in-depth approaches at moving customers along the customer journey:

- **Taking time to understand the customer's circumstances and what they want to achieve from the interaction with the project and from any subsequent home improvements.** Whilst some customers might want or need a whole house assessment, other customers may only want to focus on a specific issue. Advice also has to align with the customer's expectations about costs and funding, as well as consider factors such as their age and health. Failing to take customer wants and needs into consideration at the outset increases the risk that they will not feel listened to, don't trust the advice, and that they disengage from the customer journey.

  To do this effectively, advisers must have strong interpersonal skills. It is easier to understand customer expectations if the advice process includes a short conversation before the advice is provided, to give the adviser time to prepare. This is difficult to achieve when advice is provided at events.
- **Advisers with strong interpersonal skills as well as technical retrofit skills.** Advice is more effective when delivered by advisers who are able to build rapport with the customer and deliver advice in a way that does not patronise or judge, reassures and empowers. Advisers must also convince customers that they are qualified to provide advice. Customers who will self-fund measures are more demanding of the advice, expecting the adviser to deviate from a standard home survey approach and answer specific questions about their home.
- **Home visits using diagnostic tools are most effective at increasing customer understanding.** These visual and practical approaches make it easier for customers to

understand issues in their home and how potential solutions might work. Diagnostic tools include heat loss surveys and air tightness tests.

- **A written summary of advice with a personalised plan makes it more likely that customers will take action.** This provides customers with an opportunity to reflect on the advice. Customers may not be able to act straight away (e.g. due to being busy) and some may not be able to retain all information provided in verbal form. A written summary means the customer can revisit the advice at a time that is convenient for them. Written reports need to be tailored to the individual customer; whilst some want a comprehensive report detailing multiple scenarios of measure combinations with consideration of costs, energy and bill savings and return on investment, other customers want or need a shorter, simple summary that focus on less complex home upgrades. Regardless, customers value suggested prioritisation of measures.

Lighter touch approaches tested by the projects (e.g. advice provided at an event) tended not to include written summaries and action plans, and as a result customers have struggled to recall the advice they received, making it difficult for them to take action.

- **Some customers need hand-holding support to progress through the customer journey.** Whilst this is resource intensive, some customers fail to make progress without it. Examples include practical support to apply for funding, liaising with funders, installers or suppliers on the customer's behalf, staying with anxious customers whilst work is carried out. Some customers also need support to help prepare the home for works e.g. arrange clearing lofts so that insulation can be installed.

In general, lighter touch advice has been less effective at moving customers through the journey:

- Customers struggle to recall the details of advice provided at events. This is because the event setting can be distracting for the customer, and there is less opportunity for the adviser to produce a written summary and action plan for the customer.
- Customers found the advice to be too generic and not tailored to their unique circumstances and their home.

Having said that, the provision of light touch advice, with the offer of a discounted voucher towards the cost of measures, proved to be effective at encouraging customers who were already interested in home improvements to invest in and install relatively simple measures such as loft insulation. However, this type of approach (which was provided in a retail setting) is unlikely to be effective at getting customers to consider a broader range of measures.

Role of delivering advice locally

LEAD has shown that delivering energy efficiency advice through local providers is both effective and inclusive, particularly for hard-to-reach customers. This is because:

- Customers are more likely to trust advice from providers with a physical presence in the area and advisers embedded in the community, as they feel a stronger personal connection.

- Local delivery allows for greater flexibility—such as accommodating varied visit times, rescheduling, and follow-ups—making it easier and more cost-effective to meet the needs of these customers.
- Advisers familiar with the local geography, housing types, and community needs can offer more relevant, accurate advice and build stronger rapport, further increasing trust and engagement.

Ultimately, local delivery enhances the inclusivity and impact of energy efficiency support.

3.6.4 What challenges / barriers prevent customers from progressing through the customer journey?

Whilst the projects have had some success in moving customers along the retrofit journey, this has not been the case for all customers. The evaluation found the following challenges and barriers hindering progress:

- **Advice did not meet the needs of the customer:**
  - It was too simple or too complex for the customer to understand.
  - It failed to take into consideration the unique circumstances of the customer (e.g. health, age, financial considerations) or their home (e.g. porches, out-houses, converted loft spaces).
  - It did not handhold the customer through the journey.
- **There was appetite from customers for follow up support.** Customers would value:
  - The opportunity to ask the adviser further questions to aid their understanding and decision-making.
  - Advisers providing updates and general reassurance on the process to install measures and / or application for funding.
  - Advice about finding and engaging reputable installers once they have decided they want to install.
  - Impartial quality assurance on works completed.
- **Fundamental barriers, largely out of the control of the projects**:
- **Affordability of measures.** Fewer customers were eligible for funding than projects anticipated. As a result, they served more customers who would have to self-fund their own measures. However, most customers could not afford measures (particularly large-scale measures such as renewable heating systems and solid wall insulation) themselves, the upfront costs were perceived to be too high and, where information on return on investment was provided, customers did not believe the costs to be worthwhile.
  - **Funding eligibility criteria for measures** were described as too restrictive. Whilst projects targeted customers who they thought would be eligible for funding, they often turned out not to be (e.g. intergenerational households with

a combined income over the threshold, measures required for properties that were ineligible such as solid wall insulation, characteristics of the property making it ineligible for funding (e.g. size of loft space), and changing criteria relating to the EPC rating of the property). Projects advised customers who could not afford to put on their heating and who lived in a home that was cold, damp and poorly ventilated, but they were ineligible for funding.

- **Many homes require preparatory work before energy efficiency measures could be installed.** For the customer**,** this involved additional expense, time, effort and hassle in engaging with trades people who could carry out the work. This work was unlikely to be eligible for funding.

3.6.5 What has been learned?

Many of the key learnings from LEAD are embedded in the previous sections, about how to effectively reach, engage and advise hard-to-reach customers. Other key learnings from the evaluation that future support should consider include:

- **Engaging hard-to-reach customers is more challenging and takes more time than projects anticipated**. Projects in general over-estimated the number of customers they thought they would advise, and the conversion rate of customers advised to measures installed.
- **Increasing the understanding of hard-to-reach customers is challenging**. In person advice is essential to increase understanding. However, providing this advice is hard; it requires flexibility, persistence, trust, quality, tailoring and handholding. This has been achieved by projects at a local level but could be difficult to deliver on a larger scale.
- **The customer journey from advice to installation is longer than many projects anticipated**, taking 9-12 months instead of 3 months. Some customers require support over this period.
- **In depth and in person advice approaches are inevitably associated with higher cost per transactions.** Overall, the evidence suggests that the higher cost is worthwhile as:
  - There is greater certainty that the advice provided is accurate for the property, tailored to the customer and their home. This increases the trust that the customer has in the advice and increased the likelihood of them acting.
  - Further, a personalised plan helps customers to make decisions. It makes them more likely to act. It provides them with something to refer to if they need some time to think about next steps and / or if other life events arise.
- **The availability of funding was an important influence on customers who have gone on to install measures.** Affordability and availability of funding schemes are two significant barriers to the current uptake of measures.

  - Uptake of measures amongst this audience is unlikely to increase without further funding that supports a broader range of customers than current eligibility criteria allow.
  - Clearer and simpler eligibility criteria for funding schemes and /or a more joined up approach to advice provision and funding administration would help more customers to access funding and reduce the number of customers disengaging with the process due to frustration. It would also reduce the amount of time that advice providers spend on chasing funding administrators and reduce the chances of advice providers spending time advising customers that do not install measures because of the funding eligibility criteria and requirements.
  - Further work to help customers who are self-funding measures to understand the return on investment of measures, and the availability of suitable finance packages may help to overcome this barrier.
- **There was a significant appetite from customers wanting follow-up support.** None of the projects appear to have provided this consistently. One advice interaction is unlikely to be sufficient for many customers. Customers need the opportunity to consider advice, ask additional questions, discuss scenarios and / or changes to circumstances as well as encouragement and motivation to take the next steps. It is also likely that they will need support later in the customer journey than many of the projects had envisaged, for example finding, selecting and quality assuring installers (albeit some customers were not yet at this point on conclusion of the support).

3.6.6 Does LEAD represent value for money to the public purse?

While it is difficult to draw conclusions at programme level, overall, the available evidence suggests that the LEAD projects considered by the evaluation have delivered good value for money to the public purse.

Most projects were delivered within or below their allocated budgets (indicating strong cost controls and economical use of resources) and provided advice to households at a lower unit cost than originally forecast (indicating efficient delivery).

Several projects stood out for achieving strong outcomes at a low cost (Surrey County Council, YES Energy Solutions). Others, such as East Lindsey, North of Tyne and Plymouth, showed promising results in specific areas (e.g. uptake of government schemes or retrofit decisions), even if evidence for other outcomes was more limited. A small number of projects delivered positive outcomes but at a disproportionately high cost compared to others, indicating lower overall cost-effectiveness.

The programme engaged a wide range of vulnerable and digitally excluded households, and many projects tailored their delivery to meet the needs of these groups. While outcomes for harder-to-reach households were generally lower, reflecting the additional barriers they face, there were examples of projects that achieved strong outcomes for these groups through

targeted, well-designed support (albeit at a higher cost per transaction than other LEAD projects).

In summary, although there is variation across the project portfolio, the LEAD programme provides strong evidence that locally delivered energy advice can be a cost-effective means of driving action on retrofit, particularly where delivery is carefully targeted, engagement is well-designed, and support is personalised to household needs.

4 Overall conclusions

4.1 Providing advice and information is challenging

CAI has been designed and delivered within a challenging context:

- The complex nature of funding schemes for energy efficiency measures; this means customers have a low awareness of schemes, and even when aware they are put off from applying because it feels too difficult.
- A lack of skills and capacity in the supply chain; this means that some customers who are interested in energy efficiency measures are unable to proceed if they are unable to find a supplier that they trust.
- A lack of marketing and awareness at a national level about energy efficiency measures and their benefits; this means that customers have a low awareness and understanding of the measures that might be suitable for their property.
- Some homes require preparatory or maintenance work before energy efficiency measures can be installed effectively. This work is generally not covered by funding schemes, and some hard-to-reach customers cannot afford to undertake this work and/or find it challenging to find and engage with trades people.

4.2 How were services delivered and experienced by users?

Customer experiences vary widely. While advice content and delivery style will have influenced customer experiences, the following factors also played an important role in determining their level of satisfaction with the advice received:

- Their ability to fund measures; either through eligibility for funding or self-funding. Cost / affordability of measures and ineligibility for funding are both the main reasons for LEAD and Phoneline customers not installing.
- Their awareness and understanding of measures before interacting with the service. Both LEAD and the phoneline served customers who already had an idea of what they wanted to do in their home. The advice services provided general guidance and encouragement to take the next steps and / or helped them to overcome specific barriers. They also served customers who had very limited awareness of what could be done to their home. The challenge in these cases was for the advice to successfully move individuals from initial awareness of energy efficiency to sustained interest, a desire to install measures, and finally, concrete action.
- The resilience of the customer. The customer journey to retrofit was described as long and confusing, often longer than 9 months. Customers are more likely to make progress through the journey if they are persistent and resilient. For example, where customers are happy to call energy suppliers and /or installers, this has sometimes got

them further through the process. However, it should be noted that some customers still faced barriers that they could not overcome. In relation to this, where LEAD projects took on this role on behalf of the customer, this sometimes benefitted customers.

- In addition, the challenges that harder-to-reach customers face, e.g. language, mental / physical health, digital capacity, the extent to which they have competing priorities (e.g. caring responsibilities, health issues, financial issues, work), are all likely to affect their resilience and motivation to progress though the retrofit journey, as well as becoming barriers to them prioritising energy efficiency retrofit.

4.3 To what extent is there a need for CAI?

Above all, customers value impartial advice, from someone with their best interests at heart. CAI has delivered this.

Proactive in-person engagement in the community is likely to be needed to reach a wide variety of customers and engage them in a conversation about energy efficiency. This includes customers who have never considered energy efficiency improvements, customers who know very little about energy efficiency, and customers who are very sceptical about energy efficiency/construction and would be unlikely to respond to traditional marketing.

Handholding and follow up support are likely to be required if energy efficiency improvements are to be delivered in an inclusive way. Customers who face barriers (e.g. digital barriers, physical or mental health, low educational attainment, caring responsibilities) are very unlikely to progress through the journey without support.

However, not all advice has to be delivered face to face. Telephone advice can play a role for many customers and can be effective at particular stages of the customer journey.

Both the phoneline and LEAD have supported customers to overcome the challenging context:

- Raising awareness of and educating customers about energy efficiency improvements.
- Supporting customers to understand their eligibility for funding schemes and to apply.
- Supporting customers to identify and engage with installers.

4.4 To what extent did the services achieve their stated objectives?

The Phoneline and LEAD have delivered in line with their stated aims, however not at the scale originally envisaged. Both services took longer to mobilise than anticipated.

- The phoneline handled an average of 25 calls each day. The service reached significant numbers of customers within the target population and the intended outcomes are being met, although it was not possible to compare to targets. The phoneline did not have a separate marketing budget and therefore call rates are in

response to use of the phoneline for wider government services (which can also lead to spikes in demand).

- Collectively, the LEAD projects over-estimated the number of customers they would advise and the anticipated number of installations. This was due to a) a lack of experience of delivering in-person energy efficiency advice to base estimates on and b) learning that it took more time and resource to engage customers and move them through the customer journey than anticipated.

4.5 To what extent did the policy represent value for money to the public purse?

It is not possible to make a definitive judgement about the overall value for money of the CAI programme. The LEAD assessment focused on a subset of projects that may not be fully representative of the wider portfolio, the phoneline was assessed as a single, nationally delivered service and the digital service was out of scope of this evaluation. However, subject to these caveats, some conclusions can be drawn.

The evidence suggests that the LEAD programme demonstrated good value for money overall, particularly in terms of economy and efficiency. Most projects were delivered within budget, and the majority achieved a lower cost per transaction than originally forecast, indicating strong cost control and efficient use of resources. However, cost-effectiveness varied across projects: while some achieved strong outcomes at relatively low cost, others delivered fewer or narrower outcomes for the resources used. In addition, data limitations restrict the ability to make consistent comparisons across the programme.

The phoneline service was also delivered within budget, though it achieved lower-than-expected call volumes and costs showed limited responsiveness to changes in demand. While it met some objectives, such as providing access to advice and achieving high immediate satisfaction, it was less efficient than originally expected, and evidence of longer-term outcomes was mixed.

Across both the LEAD and phoneline services, the CAI programme was supported by strong financial oversight, and delivery remained within allocated budgets. However, weaknesses in input cost data, outcome attribution, and monitoring consistency make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about value for money for these two services, or for the programme as a whole, particularly given that the online information tool was outside the scope of this evaluation.

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