

Scottish Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR & CONFIDENCE

1. Short Description of issue

In rural areas there are few locally based energy efficiency advisers and few installers and so access to quality advice, support and information can be lacking, other than distant helplines. Although Home Energy Scotland through its phonelines tries to simplify and clarify the options available to householders there is still a lack of local familiarity with options that can leave households more sceptical about energy efficiency and cost saving solutions.

One major and serious issue is consumers' reluctance to switch away from the dominant electricity supplier - Scottish Hydro to much cheaper providers.

Other issues include distrust about the viability and reliability of an improvement measure such as cavity wall insulation, in exposed locations.

The other area of concern is householders withdrawing from schemes due to having to wait too long for a measure to be fitted, or due to the bureaucratic uncertainties of the scheme, or due to unexplained additional costs.

Plus there is a reluctance to cope with the household disturbance required to install new heating and insulation measures in solid walled and room in roof buildings.

These issues contribute to householders pulling out of the installation of measures even when they are free.

The specifically rural element is

- Time and distance from market and providers
- Suspicion about the viability and veracity of measures due to a lack of visible experience, and inadequate circulation of success stories
- a lack of in-home advice and support
- additional costs
- concern about additional weather factors

2. Analysis of the root cause of the issue

The root cause is market failure and a lack of access to trusted local advice and support, and ultimately a lack of informed choice. Also a significant proportion of the housing stock has hard to treat elements, which require more detailed scrutiny and a more intensive level of analysis and support, to identify appropriate solutions.

3. Evidence

The Green Deal Orb gives a clear insight into the lack of locally based advisors and installers, and the lack of choice in terms of available measures.

The high % of consumers remaining with SSE despite their higher charges is also evident.

4. Possible Current solutions

There needs to be a growth in access to local advice and support, and many more visible case studies published, demonstrating the veracity of measures in improving comfort levels and warmth and reducing costs, and demonstrating value for money.

Ideally there would also be more show homes showing the benefits of installing energy efficiency measures in older properties. Extending the Green Home Energy Week to focus in depth on insulation and draught proofing products would be a positive consideration.

It needs to be clear to consumers through marketing and other forms of public information provision that switching away from SSE to another company does not risk their electricity supply.

5. Possible Future Solutions

Consider new forms of holistic service delivery for remote rural communities akin to the handyperson and care and repair services.

Incentivise local contractors to work in the energy efficiency sector.

6. Resource Implications

This area could be assisted partly by using existing resources better in terms of improved communications providing greater insight into the benefits of installing measures.

Delivering support schemes differently via a Care and Repair local contractor and local advisor group should be considered for piloting.