

# Home Energy Conservation Act Reporting 2021

## Headline and Overview

- Does your Local Authority have a current strategy on carbon reduction and/or energy efficiency for domestic or non-domestic properties?

Yes – Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/sustainability/climate-change/>

- What scheme(s) is your Local Authority planning to implement in support of energy saving/carbon reduction in residential accommodation properties in the next two years?

We will implement *Green Homes Grant LAD Phase 1B* to install energy saving measures to the homes of low income households living in thermally inefficient properties. The scheme will be targeted at Park Home owners and owners living in solid wall constructed properties.

We will also implement *Green Homes Grant LAD Phase 2* to target energy saving measures to eligible households in social rented homes.

We will continue to offer *Better Housing Better Health* grants to householders with a health condition which makes them vulnerable to cold/damp homes, to provide capital grants of up to £2500 for energy efficiency and heating improvements.

We will continue to offer *Flexible Home Improvement Loans* to home owners aged 60 or over which can be used for energy efficiency and heating improvements, including renewable energy technologies.

We will continue to support the *Better Housing, Better Health advice service* operated by the National Energy Foundation, which assists vulnerable households in achieving affordable warmth using a range of tools including income maximisation, supplier switching, energy efficiency measures.

- What has been, or will be, the cost(s) of running and administering the scheme(s), such as the value of grants and other support made available, plus any other costs incurred (such as administration) as desired.

LAD1B: Total value of capital grant pot £1.7m (across whole of consortium area) plus £50K for ancillary works. £250K for administration costs.

LAD2: Total value of capital grant allocation to Bucks £1.35m.

BHBH Grants: Since 2019, £135K has been spent on the BHBH scheme to fund capital grants to 53 households of up to £2500 each plus £350 admin fees per grant approved. There is currently £68K available to spend on this scheme and further allocation of capital will be considered depending on demand.

BHBH Advice Service: Buckinghamshire Council (and a consortium of the four former districts prior to April 2020) provides £25K towards the running costs of the service. (NEF receives funding from other sources too).

Flexible Home Improvement Loans: Buckinghamshire Council provides £13.5K towards membership fees of the scheme, in return for up to £150K of loans per quarter. The capital pot for the loan payments is a revolving pot funded by a historic capital grant from the former Regional Government office, and loan repayments.

- What businesses, charities, third sector organisations or other stakeholders do you work with to deliver the scheme(s)?

We are working with Watford Borough Council and the National Energy Foundation to deliver GHG LAD 1B. The National Energy Foundation is developing a network of installers.

We will work with the four main registered providers in Buckinghamshire (Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust, Paradigm Housing Group, Red Kite and London & Quadrant) the Greater South East Energy Hub and an appointed project manager to deliver GHG LAD 2.

We work with the National Energy Foundation to deliver the Better Housing, Better Health advice service. The service brings together a network of referral partners and services - health and social care professionals, Citizens Advice Bureau, IncomeMax, Handy Helpers, Environmental Health, Community Groups, installers – to provide a tailored solution for the client. The National Energy Foundation also deliver the Council Better Housing, Better Health grants.

- What has been, or will be, the outcome of the scheme(s)? These outcomes could include energy savings, carbon savings, economic impacts such as job creation and/or increased business competitiveness or societal impacts such as alleviation of fuel poverty and/or improved health outcomes etc.

Each of the schemes referred to will be aiming to achieve one or more of the following outcomes:

- Improved energy efficiency of dwellings and associated carbon savings where measures installed.
- Reduction in fuel poverty for residents who have reduced their energy costs and/or increased their income by having measures installed, switching suppliers or claiming eligible benefits/warm home discounts etc
- Reduction in health problems associated with living in a cold or damp home and associated cost savings to NHS and social care.
- Development of the green supply chain, focusing on local installers where possible, but more generally supporting green job creation and economic recovery.

More specifically, the Green Homes Grant LAD 1B target outputs and outcomes (across whole consortium area) have been identified as:

- Vulnerable Households Supported: 200
- Measures Installed:350
- Carbon Savings: 260,190 kg of CO2
- Energy Savings: £50,525 per annum
- Jobs supported: 250 minimum

The following table summarises the outputs and outcomes of the Better Housing Better Health Service during 2019-21, across Buckinghamshire, where these can be quantified:

	2019-20	2020-21
Vulnerable households supported	240	431
Number of measures installed	501	271
Carbon savings	473242 kg CO2	415,782 kg CO2
Energy cost savings	£110422 per annum	£91155 per annum
Additional incomes awarded	£29,000	£18,000

### Communications

- Does your Local Authority provide any advisory services to customers on how to save energy? [Yes](#)

The Better Housing Better Health service delivered by the National Energy Foundation provides a free telephone advice line for residents.

The Council's website signposts residents to the Better Housing Better Health service and other energy efficiency advice and information websites such as the Energy Saving Trust.

- How do you communicate or encourage energy saving amongst domestic consumers and/or local businesses?

The Council's website signposts residents to the Better Housing Better Health service and other energy efficiency advice and information websites.

Social media – Facebook and Twitter - is also used for specific campaigns and messages.

The Council has 16 'Community Boards' which act as an interface between the Council and local communities and are used to identify issues of concern to local communities as well as to disseminate information to residents.

Housing Standards/Environmental Health Officers promote the Better Housing Better Health service when carrying out inspections for disabled facilities grants or following complaints about housing conditions.

Energy efficiency advice is included in the Council's advice booklet for HMO landlords.

### **Local Green Supply Chain**

- Have you made any assessment, or undertaken any analysis of the existing capacity in your local energy efficiency retrofit supply chain to support the decarbonisation of buildings by 2050? **No**
- What actions are you taking, if any, to upskill and/or grow the local energy efficiency installer supply chain? This could include the facilitation of training, and local installer networking opportunities.

Our GHG LAD 1B project will support the local supply chain in a number of ways. This will include project administration and management jobs, installer jobs, EPC assessor jobs and provider jobs (including BRE, for example). We expect this project to comfortably support more than 250 jobs directly, although the number should be much higher. The project will be encouraging project providers to recruit up to 15% of new entrants to their workforce through the use of apprenticeships.

- What actions are you taking, if any, to promote energy efficiency and the installer supply chain to consumers, and encourage households to consider energy retrofit?

See response to Communications section above. Actions to promote energy efficiency are generally targeted at householders likely to be eligible for our grant/assistance schemes.

- If no action is taking place in either of these two areas, please let us know of any barriers you have encountered.

There is no specific 'Home Energy Efficiency' officer (or similar) role which would co-ordinate such campaigns targeted at the wider population/supply chain. As there is already a wealth of information about home energy efficiency from trusted sources such as the Energy Saving Trust and the National Energy Foundation, the Council's role to date has been to signpost residents to this advice.

- How effectively is your LA able to engage (Trustmark/PAS2035/PAS2030 certified) installers?

The Council does not have the capacity internally to engage and procure installers for energy efficiency projects, so, to date, has used external project managers/agents for all schemes where certified installers are required.

- Do you have any plans to develop policies or initiatives in this space over the next five years as part of supporting your local decarbonisation efforts?

Yes. The Housing Team and Energy Teams are proposing to jointly look at how we grow internal capacity or otherwise procure a project manager who can develop local green supply chains to support future energy efficiency projects.

### **Social Housing**

- What action, if any, has your LA taken to install energy efficiency or low carbon heat measures in social housing? Have these been installed to a satisfactory quality? What actions (if any) have your social housing partners taken?

The Council does not have its own social housing stock. We do not have data on measures installed by our social housing partners.

- Do you have easy access to the information/knowledge within your organisation that you would expect to need for social housing retrofit projects? (e.g. stock condition; property data; approach to procurement; alignment with existing internal maintenance/upgrade plans; tenant engagement and management plans; costings)

The four main social housing providers across Bucks have recently shared EPC data and engaged in discussions about their approach to retrofit, but we do not have full access to stock condition or existing maintenance or upgrade plans.

- If no, would it be easy/difficult to obtain this information?

It is not easy to obtain this information as there are many housing providers operating throughout Buckinghamshire and each has varying levels of data, in various formats and limited resources available to work alongside the Council. The Council also has limited resources to work alongside social housing providers to obtain and analyse this information.

- Have you experienced any challenges to retrofit, including during any previous government schemes you have taken part in (e.g. supply chain, funding, tenant cooperation, mixed tenure, split incentive, policy clarity, etc)? Please provide some detail. Have social housing partners reported any challenges to retrofit?

Challenges reported by partners include financial (one RP reported significant funding issues following the need for fire safety improvements post Grenfell), stock type (solid wall/off gas), Covid (limiting inspections and access), data management/co-ordination across organisations.

- How does your LA currently/how will your LA in future plan to go about identifying suitable housing stock and measures for retrofit? How do social housing partners identify suitable stock? By the same measures or via a different method?

We do not know how social housing partners identify suitable stock/measures.

- What considerations would make you more or less likely to apply for government funding? If known, what is the opinion of your social housing partners?

Short timescales for project completion are less likely to make us (and social housing partners) to apply for funding, as annual budgets/investment programmes are agreed in advance and large scale retrofit projects take time to plan. Funding which includes project management costs is more likely to be attractive, given many organisations have limited capacity to take on new projects.

- To what extent are social housing tenants willing or unwilling to undergo retrofit, and what are the barriers and facilitators to their participation? If known, is this the same opinion across all social housing tenants or is it different with HA and ALMO tenants?

Not known.

- Does the approach to retrofit change for leaseholders in mixed tenure blocks? What encourages them to co-operate?

Not known

## Domestic Private Rented Sector (PRS) Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

- Is your authority aware of the PRS Minimum Efficiency Standards regulations requiring private rentals in England and Wales to meet a minimum energy performance rating of EPC Band E as of April 2020, unless a valid exemption applies? [Yes](#)
- Which team within your authority is responsible for, leading on enforcement of the PRS minimum standard?

[This work currently falls across three former district teams, following the formation of the new Unitary Council in April 2020. A service review is underway to bring the area teams together and it is proposed that this work will fall within the Housing & Domestic Team in Environmental Health.](#)

- What method or methods does your authority use to communicate with landlords and tenants about the standards and other related issues?

[We participate in Landlord's Forums in the North and South of the county.](#)

[Information about the minimum energy efficiency standards is available on the Council's website.](#)

[We send written reports to landlords where we have undertaken an inspection under the Housing Health and Rating System and identified potential energy efficiency improvements.](#)

[We will take enforcement action where Category 1 'excess cold' hazards are identified.](#)

- What barriers, if any, does your local authority face enforcing these regulations (e.g. identifying non-compliant properties/landlords, budgeting/resourcing, any legal issues)?

[During the last financial year \(2020-21\) Environmental Health teams have been diverted towards Covid work but even prior to that the Council has had limited resources to enforce these regulations. The service is more reactive than proactive.](#)

[On the whole, where non-compliant properties are identified, we are more likely to take action under other statutory provisions such as the Housing Act 2004, as this offer better opportunities to achieve improvements to properties and greater penalties for non-compliance.](#)

[Even if additional staff resources were available, there are difficulties in identifying which F and G properties are privately rented. The restrictions on using the EPC open data for enforcement purposes is a barrier to enforcing these regulations.](#)

- Do you directly target landlords of EPC F and G rated properties to enforce these regulations? If yes, how? If no, please explain.

No, the service is reactive, as we are not easily able to identify where breaches occur. A wider landlord registration/licensing scheme would assist in this.

### **Financial Support for Energy Efficiency**

Where possible, please set out your answers to the following questions by tenure (owner occupied, privately rented, or social housing).

- What financial programmes, if any, do you have to promote domestic energy efficiency or energy saving? If applicable please outline the budget (and % of the budget that is used), where such funding is sourced and where it is targeted.

#### **Owner Occupiers**

The Better Housing Better Health grant of up to £2500 for domestic energy efficiency measures, is targeted at owner-occupiers with a relevant health condition. Over the last two years £203K has been available for this grant and is sourced from the Better Care Fund as an alternative 'social care' capital project. There is currently £68K available to continue this scheme in the coming year.

The Healthy Homes on Prescription grant of up to £5000 is targeted at households who are at risk of emergency hospital admission or are unable to be discharged from hospital due to their house conditions. As such, this scheme is used to provide heating and insulation measures where the resident is at risk from a cold home. Referrals are from health professionals. Funding is provided from the Better Care Fund.

#### **Owner-occupiers and Private Rented**

The Flexible Home Improvement Loan scheme is available for both home owners aged 60 or over and for landlords carrying out essential improvements. The maximum loan depends on the available equity and is funded via a loan pot initially set up with a government grant provided to a consortium of local authorities in 2008. A 'quota' of £150,000 per quarter is made available to the Council from this loan pot.

Green Homes Grant LAD Phase 1B will be available to eligible fuel poor owner-occupiers or private tenants until September 2021. See section on Green Homes Grant for more details.

The Council has published a Statement of Intent to enable eligible home owners and private tenants to access ECO funding.

#### **Owner-occupiers, private tenants and social housing tenants**

All tenures are able to access advice and support from the National Energy Foundation's Better Housing, Better Health advice service. This can include installation of small measures (eg draft-proofing, radiator foil, low-energy lightbulbs) and assistance to reduce energy bills by supplier switching.

It is proposed that Green Homes Grant Phase 2 is targeted at social housing tenants.

- What future investment for energy efficiency or low carbon heat measures do you have planned, and when are these investments planned for?

It is proposed that the above schemes will continue into 2021-22 and beyond, if possible.

### Fuel Poverty

- Does your Local Authority have a Fuel Poverty Strategy? Yes
- What steps have you taken to identify residents/properties in fuel poverty? What blockers, if any, have there been in identifying households in fuel poverty?

The Affordable Warmth Strategy identifies geographic locations where residents are most likely to be in fuel poverty by looking at a combination of IMD data, BEIS fuel poverty statistics, solid walled properties and areas off the gas network. EPC data is also used to help to identify residents in fuel poverty.

The National Energy Foundation use the BEIS guidance to assess whether individuals are in fuel poverty for the purposes of eligibility for ECO Flex.

The BRE are currently undertaking a data gathering and mapping exercise for the Council to help us to better target the Green Homes Grant and other interventions towards residents in fuel poverty.

Historically, lack of up to date information and difficulty in accessing benefits data have been barriers to identifying fuel poor households.

- How does fuel poverty interlink with your local authority's overall Carbon Reduction Strategy?

The Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy identifies that the Council has a role to 'enable change' and to 'inform and influence' where the reduction in carbon emissions is not directly within the Council's control.

- Please highlight any fuel poverty issues specific to your area.

Large parts of the county are rural and some are off the gas network. There is a higher than average older population. While, in general, the population is more wealthy than the national average, some older home owners are asset rich and cash poor, living alone on fixed incomes in large houses which are expensive to heat.

- What measures or initiatives have you taken to promote fuel cost reduction for those in fuel poverty? Include information on partnerships with local businesses or energy providers you have.

The Better Housing Better Health service assists residents with supplier switching to help minimise fuel costs. The service also ensures eligible residents are registered for Warm Home Discounts. This service is promoted via the Council's website, referral partners, social media campaigns and Environmental Health/Housing Standards officers, as outlined above in 'Communications'.

#### **Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery**

- Has your Local Authority Participated in GHG: LAD? **Yes**
  - If yes, please indicate which phase you participated in and briefly outline the project.

Buckinghamshire is in a consortium with Watford Borough Council who led on a Bid for Phase 1a, which was unsuccessful, but was successful in being awarded funding under Phase 1B.

The project is to provide a fully managed grant scheme largely targeted at park home owners and owners of solid walled properties. The scheme will assist applicants in identifying eligible measures, obtaining contractor quotations and signing off the works. The scheme will be managed by the National Energy Foundation on behalf of the Council.
- Would your Local Authority be in a position to manage the delivery of upgrades through a scheme such as LAD in 2022?

No. It is unlikely that we would be in a position to directly manage the delivery of upgrades but would consider participation where funding is available to cover the costs of a project manager.
- If no, please indicate what barriers would prevent you from delivering upgrades in your area.

Lack of staff resource to manage projects  
Lack of existing relationships with installers  
Demand for upgrades is unknown

## The Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

- Has your local authority published a Statement of Intent (Sol) for ECO flexibility eligibility? (Y/N) **Yes**

Please answer the following questions to help us to understand LA Flex delivery in more detail:

- How many declarations were issued for low income vulnerable households?

**333**

- How many declarations were issued for Fuel Poor households? **0**

- How many declarations were issued for in-fill? **0**

- What is the highest income cap published in your Sol?

**£45,750 for a household of 2 adults with four or more children.**

- If you have used an income over £30k gross, what reason have you given?

**Buckinghamshire is an area of high housing and living costs. The average property value is £400K, an average rent for a three bed house is £1500per month. After taking these costs into account larger families are left with relatively low incomes, leaving them at risk of fuel poverty.**

- Do you charge for declarations to be signed? If so, please state how much?

**We do not charge, but we require installers to be registered with the National Energy Foundation's supplier network, who charge a sign-up fee for installers to be part of their network and agree to abide by a framework of standards.**

## Smart Metering

- Please provide a brief statement outlining your current or planned approach to promote smart meter take up and supporting residents to achieve benefits.

The Council does not have resources to directly promote and support take up of smart meters.

The National Energy Foundation asks householders whether they have a smart meter installed as part of their 'warm and well assessment' which is undertaken at the start of each *Better Housing, Better Health* enquiry. This is intended to spark further questions and provide an opportunity to alleviate any common concerns.

- Please provide further information on activities relating to smart metering, including but not limited to:
  - a. Integrating approaches to delivering energy efficiency improvements in residential accommodation
  - b. Arranging for smart meters to be installed by energy suppliers in vacant social housing premises
  - c. Using social landlords to promote smart meter uptake
  - d. Including smart meters in landlord licencing schemes
  - e. Supporting residents who have had appliances condemned for safety reasons
  - f. Other supporting activities

The Council is proposing to consider the opportunities and benefits of promoting smart meters with the National Energy Foundation, as part of the on-going monitoring of the delivery of the *Better Housing, Better Health* scheme.

This subject will also be raised with the Registered Providers, as we continue to develop working relationships with them in relation to improving the energy efficiency of the social housing stock.

The financial assistance schemes outlined under 'Financial Support for Energy Efficiency' are available to residents who cannot afford to replace a condemned heating boiler or appliance.

#### **Future Schemes and Wider Incentives**

- Please outline any further schemes or wider initiatives not covered above that your local authority has carried out or is planning to undertake to improve energy efficiency in residential accommodation.

The Council will consider making an application to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund when bidding opens for Round 2.