

## Project type: Home energy assessments

### Name of example: **Bedminster Energy Group**

#### **The organisation**

Bedminster Energy Group (BEG) is a small group of volunteers who encourage efficient energy use and renewable energy generation in the areas of Bedminster and Southville in South Bristol. The group was originally formed as a sub-group of a larger organisation in the area called Sustainable Southville. BEG hold events and activities to promote actions for people to reduce their bills and keep the heat in their homes during the winter.

#### **The background**

In January 2012, the group won a £53,000 grant as part of DECC's Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) to assess the energy efficiency of their local housing stock. Along with a range of activities, the money allowed them to commission a report assessing the 12,000 properties in the local area to understand the energy use of local homes and to identify where the biggest and lowest cost improvements could be made to increase energy efficiency and reduce energy bills.

BEG decided that they would also carry out home energy assessments to supplement the results of the commissioned report and to improve engagement with local people. By collecting detailed information from home energy surveys about the types of homes people in the community live in, the group felt they would be able to share useful information locally about the best ways to reduce bills and save energy, and could develop schemes to meet the needs of local people. Carrying out home energy surveys with householders also created a direct link between the group and the local community, and built awareness and interest in issues surrounding energy and potential for installing energy efficiency improvements.

#### **The project**

The aim of the project was to gain a detailed understanding of the energy efficiency of local housing in the Bedminster and Southville area of Bristol and to raise awareness among residents of the opportunities for making improvements.

This was achieved by:

- recruiting and training a team of 30 local energy assessors;
- conducting door-to-door surveys of about 600 homes;
- analysing the survey data and feeding the results into a technical housing assessment commissioned separately as part of the LEAF project;
- subject to consent being given, maintaining contact with participating households to promote energy efficiency initiatives

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BEG decided to recruit a number of individual local assessors rather than contract a single firm to undertake the survey work – this being more in line with the group's ethos of supporting the local economy and improving local knowledge and awareness. The roles were advertised locally, and surveyors did not need to have any previous experience of energy surveying but were required to attend a half day training session. This covered basic energy efficiency in the home as well as the survey process itself.

Surveyors were allocated target streets in the area, and given between six and 36 surveys each to complete. Prior to beginning the surveys, BEG spoke to the community police team to make them aware of what they were doing and when, including providing a list of street names. All surveyors were given name badges for the survey work which had the BEG logo and an expiry date and carried with them a letter explaining the project and flyers about BEG. They worked only on the streets to which they were allocated and were instructed not to enter homes unless specifically requested to do so by the owner.

The survey data was collected using a paper-based energy audit pro-forma with a number of questions for the householder about their current energy system and any home improvements they planned to make. A template for this pro-forma is provided in chapter 8 of this resource. To capture the information, the surveyors entered the information from their doorstep surveys onto an online database. To encourage participation, BEG organised a prize draw and developed an online version of the survey for people who missed the assessors when they called door-to-door.

The group were lucky that their timing coincided with a 'special offer' on the councils' free local insulation scheme. During the surveys, the group were also able to flag this up which resulted in many people getting their lofts and cavity walls insulated for free.

The surveyors were paid according to the number of surveys they completed, as well as the quality and quantity of information generated. For ease, the surveyors were required to be self employed so that they were able to invoice BEG for the work. Most surveyors were paid around £100 for six completed surveys, though a few offered their services pro bono. Surveyor contact was co-ordinated by volunteers from BEG.

Data was used to feed into the housing assessment report commissioned as part of the LEAF project. Since the end of the project, contact details from householders who gave their agreement have been added to the group's mailing list for monthly newsletters, and data has been used to scope out opportunities for local schemes. The group is also planning a targeted mail out to promote Green Deal to those customers who showed an interest.

## **Achievements and lessons learned**

The group are positive about the result of their work and say, "It was a huge undertaking and we were really pleased with the results!"

Bridget Newbery, who co-ordinated the project says:

"Although it took a massive amount of energy to get so many energy audits carried out in such a short space of time, it did mean there was a real focus in the area – you could see our flyers in local pubs and in public buildings, and when surveyors knocked on people's doors the householder often knew all about it in advance.

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The street by street approach and giving surveyors name badges also worked really well. We didn't want to annoy people by calling twice, and we wanted to reassure them we were a bona fide group. It also helped explaining right at the start that the group was a voluntary group and that we were not selling anything.

"Lots of people refused to come to the door or were unwilling to complete the survey. If we did it again, then choosing summer months with lighter and warmer evenings probably would have helped – and would have been nicer for the surveyors. The best time to call seemed to be after school but before dinner time. We had tried to set up a flyer drop in the area but were let down by a rogue trader. In different circumstances we'd have postponed the door knocking to give time for a postcard to be delivered to every home in the area explaining what we were planning to do.

"We used the Centre for Sustainable Energy to run training sessions for the surveyors which meant we could be confident everyone was at a reasonable level of understanding and had up to date information on key issues. If other groups are planning to do a similar project we'd be happy to share the resources we developed."

## Links

Bedminster Energy Group website: [www.bedminsterenergy.org.uk](http://www.bedminsterenergy.org.uk)

PlanLoCaL resource: 'Template energy survey pro forma'.

PlanLoCaL resource: 'Using home energy assessments to engage householders'.

## Resources

People 

You could do this with a small or large group of people, and over an extended period of time, depending on the sample size you want to collect. BEG managed about 600 surveys in 2 months which was 30 people each putting in on average 4 half-days of work, some as volunteers, others being paid at a rate per 'batch' of surveys.

The core team who led the project and recruited energy surveyors consisted of 5 people with two of the volunteers taking a co-ordinating role which probably entailed 2-3 days of work each.

Technical skills 

The project did not involve a large amount of technical knowledge, and all energy surveyors were provided with training before beginning the data collection. However, if a group wanted to do an in-depth analysis of the results of an energy survey themselves – for example, quantifying potential carbon savings or estimating the proportion of costs that might be eligible for Green Deal or ECO support – then that would require a much deeper knowledge. A more simple analysis could involve just totalling up the numbers of responses. Creating a survey pro-forma to capture information would also require a certain level of technical knowledge so using a template has definite advantages.

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## Finances

BEG allocated £10,000 to the large scale door-to-door household energy survey. This was used to cover:

- Surveyor payments for minimum of 500 surveys (£100 for 6 surveys)
- Incentives for householders (£200 prizes)
- Set up costs to cover stationery; printing; postcards to explain survey to householders; adverts; postage and copying of additional surveys and flyers

The project could be run on a much lower scale and a lower budget, particularly if it was run over an extended period of time through volunteers carrying out the door to door surveys, and more promotion of an online survey which is effectively a 'free' way to collect data once it has been set up. It's the sort of project that could also work well across a wider area with several community groups working jointly.

## Project partners

BEG worked with the Southville Community Development Association to help to recruit volunteers. They also worked with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, who provided the pro-forma template for the energy survey form, and with Reading University who gave some advice on additional questions about householder motivations. The practical work of recruiting volunteers, organising training, allocating streets and ensuring that payments were made was co-ordinated by the core team of BEG volunteers themselves.

## Green Deal potential

Carrying out home energy assessments doesn't necessarily have to be directly connected to the Green Deal, although providing Green Deal accredited assessments is an option for a group who have the resources to undertake this kind of project and train volunteers as Green Deal Advisors.

Conducting unaccredited home energy surveys on a street-by-street basis provides an invaluable source of information about the local housing stock and is a great way to educate householders about the options available under the Green Deal. By identifying where the most appropriate energy efficiency improvements can be made, surveyors can flag the Green Deal or other relevant schemes to householders, which may in turn generate referral income for a group. However, gathering data can act as an evidence base to underpin the rollout of improvements across the area whether they are funded by Green Deal finance or not.

For more information about gathering and using street-by-street home energy data, please see the PlanLoCaL resources on CSE's Housing Assessment Tool (HAT) and template energy survey. Potential community roles in Green Deal assessments are discussed further in Chapter 5 of this pack.