

The implications of energy efficiency for the environment and employment start at home, finds [Jill Theobald](#)

Doctors in the house

Foreword by
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When it comes to encouraging energy efficiency in the home, a more traditional helping hand is getting the thumbs up.

According to research we recently commissioned into householder attitudes, word of mouth and a familiar face are the most likely methods to break down the barriers to energy efficiency improvements.

In my *New Start* column just last month I warned that, if carbon reduction targets are to stand a chance of being met, advice must get personal.

The findings of our research, conducted by Ipsos Mori, back up this view with respondents saying they would be far more likely to fit loft insulation or draught exclusion if they were given an independent helping hand from someone they trust.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of people without loft insulation would be more likely to invest in it if they received a home visit from an energy advisor. Meanwhile, a fifth of those lacking draught proofing of doors or windows would be more inclined towards installation work if they received help either from a home visit by a local advisor, or a friend to help them do it themselves (30%).

Personal recommendation is key. Nearly a third of those without cavity wall insulation said they would prefer to use a company recommended by a friend or relative if they were

to have the work done, and more than a quarter (27%) of those without loft insulation agreed. A contractor provided by an energy company was less favoured, with just 13% of those without cavity wall insulation and 8% without loft insulation favouring this option.

Despite the fact energy companies offer subsidies, they appear to be a less popular choice – perhaps because they are perceived as having a vested interest in customers' energy use. The message is clear – people want to save money and reduce their carbon footprint, but it is the personal touch that is needed to convince them.

Groundwork has been helping vulnerable people reduce their bills and get more heat for their money for several years now and we know people appreciate a familiar face – someone who can explain their options and help organise the work.

A network of experienced advisors, skilled in providing support to communities, can help navigate the red tape and paperwork, offer guidance and help on grants and support the search for reliable organisations to carry out the work.

Working in partnership with the third sector, local authorities and, more broadly, the housing sector as a whole, could have a greater impact in removing barriers to energy efficiency.

There is a bigger picture to consider here as well, with

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Case study **The client**

The 'Green Doctor' scheme is run by Groundwork and aims to tackle the issue of fuel poverty in low-income households through a mixture of workshops and home visits.

Since 2007 the personalised, one-to-one service has helped vulnerable households including disabled, elderly and families with young children, in deprived wards across west Yorkshire.

Spreading a 'keep warm, keep green' message, the Green Doctors provide 'remedies' for low-income households – adjustments and adaptations to ensure homes are not just more environmentally friendly, but cheaper to run.

Measures including energy-saving light bulbs, draught proofing and reflective radiator panels are installed free of charge, while the representatives can also provide signposting to relevant grants and support and cover issues such as recycling and water usage.

Between April 2007 and June last year more than 1,000 home visits were carried out, 99 presentations were given to more than 3,000 residents, and vulnerable residents suffering from fuel poverty in Leeds alone saved over £865,000.

Auralee Evans was one of the first clients to get a green 'diagnosis' on her property in Calderdale, following a recommendation from Pennine Housing.

'They thought it would help me with rising fuel payments and combat heat loss in my home,' she explains. 'Suffering from high fuel bills has made me fear putting the heating on, leaving me with a choice between eating or heating. The house is a lot colder than it should be a lot of the time which makes my illnesses worse.'

She adds: 'Hopefully, following the Green Doctor visit, it'll reduce my fuel bills and heat loss in an effort to save money which will make my home more comfortable.'



Green Doctor beneficiary Auralee Evans from Calderdale

the benefits of energy efficiency being felt beyond the home with a positive impact on the world of employment.

Groundwork has a long track record of building local partnerships, engaging with communities and delivering local employment programmes. Through our partnership work with the National Housing Federation, Groundwork is one of the largest deliverers of the Future Jobs Fund so we know just how beneficial investing in the green jobs sector can be when it comes to addressing youth unemployment.

In particular, we are helping to deliver jobs that give young people with little or no experience the chance to learn new 'green' skills that will bring them to the forefront of this emerging sector and economy.

And we aren't the only ones aware of the correlation between energy efficient homes and economic development. Just last month housing minister John Healey revealed more details about the country's biggest ever green home building programme involving the 'toughest ever' environmental standards.

Mr Healey acknowledged that 'green living isn't just about homes', emphasising that: 'By the time the eco-towns are finished, green living will already be a way of life for these communities.'

'Local workers, including apprentices, will help build these pioneering homes and other projects. This will arm them with the new skills in green construction, giving them a head start on their career paths.'

At the moment there is no official government-led UK energy efficiency programme, but with organisations like Groundwork offering residents a helping hand in improving their flats or houses, it could be said that saving carbon and money begins at home.

Case study The employee



Groundwork Leeds' successful bid to the Future Jobs Fund has financed the creation of ten jobs for local long-term unemployed young people.

The positions are designed to upskill the long-term unemployed for the future.

Aaron Napper (pictured left) joined the scheme as a Green Doctor assessor after the local job centre offered him an application form.

'It sounded interesting, but I'd had interviews offered before so I wasn't expecting anything,' he says. 'Once I'd had my interview, my mind started ticking.

I started thinking about

things like climate change and what I'd actually be doing and all the interaction with other people.'

The 22-year-old believes his Green Doctor experience, combined with a City and Guilds qualification he is due to complete, will open doors.

'It means I can do more for climate change in the future or work in the same field.'



The Green Doctor model has been extended south with the backing of Islington Council

Case study The spin-off

The Green Doctor service works across Leeds, Morley and Calderdale, and has been piloted in Bradford. But 'prescribing a cure for fuel poverty' is also taking off in London and the Thames Valley, too.

Groundwork London was last year commissioned by the Islington Strategic Partnership to deliver an Energy Doctor in the Home programme which carried out 245 visits to 100 households in a single 12-week period.

The two-year project is funded by the Islington Strategic Partnership, Newlon Fusion, Ebico and Homes for Islington (HFI) and supported by Islington council which runs an Energy Doctor in the Community programme.

Clients are screened and referred by the council's Green Living Centre and the local authority also promotes the service in resident publications.

Groundwork London development director Wendy Baverstock says local authority involvement has been instrumental in helping get the message across that Green Doctors' remedies can boost the health of poorer homes.

Indeed, the link-up between the local authority and Groundwork is seeing the personal touch in action. 'The joint branding means that residents recognise and trust the service,' she says.