

Home Energy Conservation Act

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**Friends of
the Earth
Scotland**

The Home Energy Conservation Act (1996) charged scottish local authorities with achieving 'substantial' improvements in domestic energy efficiency. The Secretary of State at the time issued guidance that this meant around a 30% improvement over 10 years, the figure English and Welsh authorities were *required* to achieve. Unfortunately, in Scotland, such mandatory targets were not set, and local authorities even managed to negotiate their targets down to as low as 9%.

Why is HECA important?

In Scotland, domestic energy use accounts for around 23% of climate change emissions. HECA should be a major tool in the fight against home energy inefficiency, yet for various reasons HECA has not succeeded as much as it could have.

HECA figures

Figures for the first four years of HECA show that 'substantial' improvements have not yet been attained. While results in individual local authorities vary greatly, the average energy efficiency improvement over the first four years of HECA's operation (1997-2001) was only 6.9%. In order to be on target to achieve a 30% improvement by 2010, local authorities should have already made a 12% improvement in energy efficiency. Only one local authority achieved this.

When you compare local authorities'

progress against their own adjusted targets the situation looks more favourable. Yet only a few local authorities are on track to even meet these targets, and it looks a lot less impressive when you look at what these targets were, with local authorities in this category such as Dumfries and Galloway and Perth and Kinross having targets of only 13% and 10.3% respectively.

97-01 average improvement – 6.9%
97-99 improvement – 2.8%
99-01 improvement – 4.2%

Considering that the majority of work carried out so far has been to local authorities' own stock, it becomes apparent that the likelihood of most authorities reaching the aspirational 30% target is small. When authorities start to focus more on the private sector, rates of progress are likely to diminish considerably.

Regional comparisons

Three of the best :

Aberdeen : 14.5%
West Lothian : 11.9%
East Ayrshire : 11.3%

Three of the worst :

Borders : 2.5%
Perth and Kinross : 3.9%
Highland : 4.3%

Comparison with England and Wales

Defra has just published the latest Home Energy Conservation Act energy efficiency improvement figures for England and Wales. Under the Act, local authorities are required to achieve a 30% energy efficiency improvement in homes by 2010.

English local authorities are 7 years into a 15-year process which began in 1996 which means that in 2003, to have been on target, they ought to have made a 14% improvement on their 1996 figures. The average improvement was 12.5%. Nonetheless over a quarter of local authorities had achieved a 14% improvement, with the North East achieving an 18.5% average improvement.

Barriers and solutions

Mandatory targets : HECA should be amended to include mandatory local energy efficiency targets to ensure that the Executive commits sufficient resources to the Act and to create greater confidence in the energy efficiency market. Mandatory targets have proved more effective in achieving higher rates of improvement in England and Wales. These local targets should be supported by national energy efficiency targets.

Resources : HECA was introduced without any additional resources and there is a lack of consistency in the resources available. Additional resources should be allocated to the operation of HECA from both national and local sources, these should be ring fenced and successful pilot schemes should be retained rather than reinvented.

Information : Local authorities have neither sufficient nor accurate enough information on energy efficiency in private sector stock. All homes in Scotland should be energy audited at change of occupancy to provide more information on the quality of the housing stock and encourage energy efficiency improvements in the pri-

vate sector. An EC Directive requires the introduction of domestic energy auditing over coming years. The Scottish Executive may introduce this in the forthcoming Private Housing Bill.

Control : Local authorities have been required to ensure improvements in the private sector without any real powers to do so. Recent changes such as the addition of minimum thermal efficiency standards to the Tolerable Standard, and the requirement for private landlords to register with the local authority (Antisocial Behaviour Act 2004), should improve matters over coming years, but there is still more to do. Minimum energy efficiency standards should be incorporated into private landlord registration conditions in the forthcoming Private Housing Bill. Building standards should also be improved to incorporate existing buildings in a meaningful way.

Co-ordination : The energy efficiency sector is very complex, with numerous agencies and organisations awarding grants and running an even greater number of schemes, leading to public confusion and repetition of effort. The sector needs greater co-ordination. The provision of energy advice is currently under review which should help to resolve some of these problems. This could be supported by an expansion in, and clarification of, local authorities' responsibilities, and a requirement on local authorities to appoint a dedicated HECA officer, through amendment of HECA.

Scope : The scope of currently operating energy efficiency schemes fail to tackle large numbers of potentially energy inefficient properties and vulnerable groups of people. The schemes should be extended to incorporate, for example, household renewables to address energy efficiency in hard to heat homes, and to apply to additional groups of people.