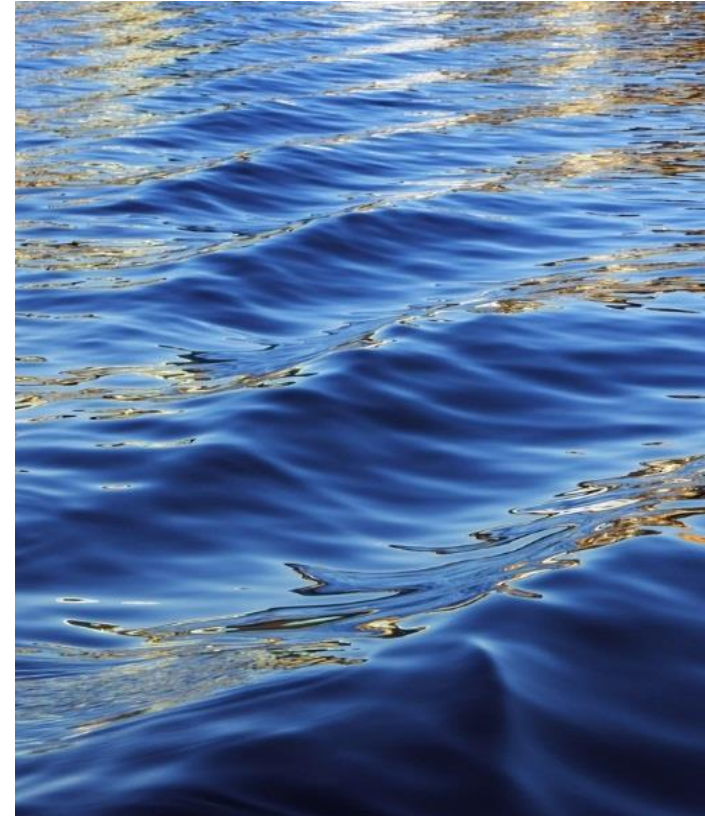


Engaging hard to
reach residents:-
Findings from LEAD
focus groups

Cat Reeby
Jan 2025



LEAD Focus groups

Surrey Climate Commission's role:

- To engage with communities and facilitate their input.
- To target 'hard to reach' and 'hard to treat' households.

We wanted to understand the barriers to action, and co-create potential solutions to help 'hard to reach' households benefit from home energy saving measures.

Focus groups:

Date	Focus Group audience	Partner and Location	Number of participants
30-Nov-23	Low income, fuel poor	The Hive, Park Barn, Guildford	11
26-Feb-24	Ethnic minority	SMEF, Camberley	11
11-Mar-24	Rural, off gas, older homes	Hurst Green Community	12
09-May-24	Disabled	Surrey Coalition for Disabled People, virtual	12
23-May-24	Non-English speaking	Shifa, Woking	9

- 5 in-person focus groups held, engaging 55 residents from the priority groups.
- Circa 20% drop out attendance, even with £50 incentive voucher.



MAKING ENERGY ADVICE WORK FOR ALL OF US

Join us for a morning with a free lunch, and get a **£50** voucher for your time

Do you want your home to be warmer and cheaper to heat? Are you confused about what you can do about it?

Join our Local Energy Advice focus group and share your thoughts and ideas.

We want people from Park Barn & Westborough to feed into the design of a new Surrey County Council energy advice service for Surrey.

Thursday 30 November

11:00 am to 1:15 pm followed by sandwiches

The Community Suite, The Hive, Park Barn Drive, GU2 8EN

To express your interest, please contact
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Surrey Climate Commission
Community Wellbeing

Demographics - questionnaire

Across the 5 focus groups, there were 55 participants, of whom 39 completed the pre-event questionnaire.

QUESTION	YES	NO / Don't know	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4
Do you pay for the energy used in your home	35	4	100%	90%	91%	75%
Do you know roughly how much you spend on energy?	32	7	70%	90%	91%	75%
Do you think you spend more than 10% of your household income on heating and energy?	18	19	60%	50%	27%	50%
Do you rent your home?	8	31	50%	10%	9%	13%
Do you have gas heating?	31	8	90%	90%	82%	50%
Is English the main language in your home?	36	3	100%	70%	100%	100%
Are you, or anyone living in your home, unwell or disabled?	14	25	40%	0%	27%	88%
Are there any children under the age of 17 living in your home?	13	26	50%	50%	27%	0%
Are there any people aged 65 or over living in your home?	18	21	50%	10%	55%	75%

Insights from the questionnaires



46% spent over 10% of their income on energy (fuel poverty)



36% had someone unwell or disabled at home (88% for FG4)



21% lived in rented accommodation. 50% for FG1



33% had one or more children under 17 living at home



21% did not have gas heating (50% for FG4)



46% had someone aged 65 + living at home



8% did not speak English at home. 30% for FG2



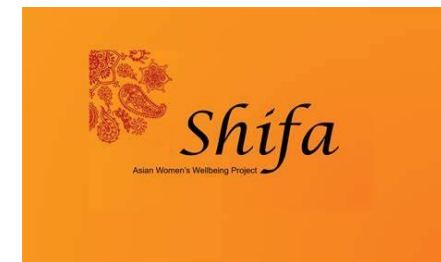
Focus Group feedback – key themes

Key Themes from the 'Barriers':

- No spare money / cost of measures
- Complexity of doing retrofit
- Not knowing where to get help
- Lack of trust, fear of scams, mistrust in government
- Other higher priorities, e.g. food, health, income
- Landlords / rented
- Specific comments on: non-English speakers, older homes, practical challenges for disabled people etc

Key Themes from 'Solutions':

- Grants and financial support are needed (for all)
- Help from trusted people (community, council)
- Impartial information, including no and low-cost measures
- Local communication from trusted partners
- Have a local presence
- More hand-holding support for the most vulnerable



Barriers:- some comments.....

Do the tradespeople understand disability, or will they take advantage of the client?

In the long run it saves you money. But we need money now just to keep going.

There's too much jumping through hoops – and then are you eligible?

Heat or eat – it shouldn't be a choice

What help is there for tenants?

Can I just talk to someone on the phone first?

I pay the electricity through landlord so can't have a smart meter or shop around for a better price.

We're struggling with money – food bills etc. Short term – just keep going & prioritise. Long term - we can't think that far ahead.

Cowboy builders are a worry

It's complicated with lots of hurdles

Why should older people have to be cold? It's that or sell their homes.

If English is not your first language its very hard. It affects your confidence.

If you've got solid walls you can't have a heat pump

What's the point of saving carbon, when the UK is such a small part?

I'm not the decision-maker in the home. It's my in-laws, and I can't predict what they would agree to.

Solutions.....

Needs to be truly impartial. Independent expert and impartial report

Long-term flexible funding – that doesn't keep changing

Personal recommendation from a neighbour/friend.

Proper services for real people

Increase funding criteria to include 'middle person' – who are not eligible for benefits but also don't have savings to retrofit

Liaise with community leaders

Link with community organisations, attend their sessions and speak

There should be a Universal basic income for everyone, so you don't have to choose to heat or eat

Experienced and well-trained people to help you and fix things

Guarantee that still works if the company is no longer in existence.

Getting the word out, not just on council website

Some specific insights

Low income households

- 'Getting by' is the main priority – making it hard to plan ahead
- People in rented accommodation often do not trust their landlord not to evict them or put the rent up. They don't want to risk asking for improvements.
- Many described problems with condensation which energy efficiency alone will not solve – larger maintenance solutions are needed.

Ethnic groups:

- There are cultural and language differences including
 - Lack of confidence to ask for / challenge things in a foreign language
 - Family hierarchies – who makes the decisions?
- Information will need to be available in different languages, and in plain English forms – both printed and spoken (i.e. call centres need to cover a variety of languages)
- Many of most vulnerable are in poor quality rented accommodation

'We fall between the gaps. I'm working but don't earn enough to do measures'

'What if I can't get online to apply?'

'Council landlords – full of excuses or a very long wait'

'I have to go without food so my baby stays warm'

'I worry about people coming to the house'

'Older people just turn the heating off'

'People need to hear from their own language speakers'

'Many don't even know what their rights are or what help is available'

Some specific insights

Rural and older properties

- Many rural areas already feel overlooked.
- Older properties are harder and more expensive to treat.
- They may benefit from traditional solutions (breathable insulation and higher ventilation) and life-styles (open fires, cooler temperatures).
- Renewable energy is of interest to this group, but there is concern about reliability of installers and new technology.

Elderly and disabled:

- Appropriate communication methods are key e.g. via trusted networks (Age UK, Surrey Coalition etc) and in a variety of formats – printed leaflets / posters, large print, talking newspaper, in-person etc.
- On-line application systems tend to be less favoured
- A real concern about potential scams & having strangers in their homes
- Specific physical challenges around clearing lofts and doing 'simple' low-cost measures. Trusted tradespeople and carers are critical.

'Solid walls are harder to insulate'

'ASHP plus energy efficiency measures are very effective, but expensive to fit'

'Local tradespeople are more likely to be reliable. They have a reputation to uphold locally.'

'Be transparent from the start about the true financial cost of the project.'

'DIY is not an option for disabled people'

'It's hard to get insulation for mobile homes'

'Carers may come in unscheduled and that can make planning for the works complicated as you have to prioritise carers'

Final thoughts

- Every home and household is different. Services need to be **flexible** to allow tailoring.
- Many of the 'standard / easy win' measures have been done. Solutions will become more **complex and expensive**.
- Grants are too complex, short-term and hard to access. Rethink → **simple to apply, more inclusive**.
- Rented sector – a real challenge. **Protect tenants. Incentivise landlords.**
- 'Local' and 'Trusted' come up again and again. Work with & fund the **Third Sector** to be part of Retrofit strategy.
- Protect households: **accreditation and guarantees**
- Helping the most vulnerable -> **Take services out** to food banks, community centres, child services etc



Any questions?

Please get in touch

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