

Sign in

Contribute →

The
Guardian

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle



Environment ▶ Climate change Wildlife Energy Pollution

**Energy efficiency**

£3bn green home grants scheme faltering just weeks after launch

Accreditation process putting off builders and installers from plan to improve energy efficiency of homes in England

Fiona Harvey *Environment correspondent*

Sat 14 Nov 2020 09.00 GMT



179

The government's plan to insulate England's draughty homes is faltering because builders and installers are failing to sign up, leaving thousands of households unable to access the £3bn green home grants

[Access the £3bn green home grants.](#)

Offering up to £5,000 - or £10,000 for those on low incomes - for energy efficiency measures such as insulation and heat pumps, the scheme is intended to help people save on gas and electricity bills and cut carbon emissions, as well as creating thousands of green jobs. It was unveiled in July as part of an [economic rescue package for the coronavirus pandemic](#).

According to government data, only 1,174 installers have signed up to the scheme, which started on 30 September, while more than 36,000 householders have applied for the grants, which will be available until March.

Green campaigners are growing increasingly concerned about the scheme, which is so far the UK's only policy measure aimed at a [green recovery](#), despite Boris Johnson's pledge to ["build back better"](#). The prime minister is expected to unveil a [10-point plan](#) for reaching net zero emissions within the next fortnight, but it is expected to miss out many of the potential "shovel-ready" green projects economists have said would create jobs and shift the UK to a low-carbon economy.

Households wanting to take advantage of the green home grant must find an accredited installer to do the work, but many are reluctant to invest the time and money needed to gain accreditation. The short duration of the scheme means they fear being left in the lurch when it closes.

The Federation of Master Builders (FMB), which represents many of small building firms expected to deliver the energy efficiency improvements, said its members were put off by the complexity of the accreditation process.

"The green homes grant scheme is a positive step forward but it is not enough ... In its current form, many builders are concluding that the scheme does not merit them committing the level of investment needed," said Brian Berry, the FMB's chief executive.

Andrew McCausland, the director of Wirral Property Group, spent about £6,000 and an estimated 160 hours of unpaid work to get his team accredited. He felt the process was worthwhile given the size of his business, but said smaller firms could find it more of a challenge.

"It has taken me many days to work through the requirements of the various certifying and accrediting bodies and arrange suitable insurance cover - the whole process has been very time-consuming for me to navigate," he said. "I would advise other builders to only get involved if they have dedicated administrative support on the payroll."

[Dale Chadwick, an owner of a building firm, gave up in the face of the complexity](#)

Dave Chadwick, an owner of a building firm, gave up in the face of the complexity, despite having fulfilled the requirements for other accreditation schemes.

“We are a TrustMark registered company, and have completed an independent inspection on joining the FMB,” he said. “However, further and more extensive competency checks are required which were not possible to secure within the timeframe. I’m a huge advocate of investing in training and upskilling, but the scheme is not fit for purpose in its current form.”

Builders and insulation installers have bitter experience of a previous government scheme such as the [green deal](#) which was [abandoned five years ago](#), leading to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs in the sector. Since it was scrapped, there has been no government incentive for households to undertake the costly work of better insulating their homes. The [industry has stagnated](#) as a result.

Gary Olsen, the director of Create For You (Developments), said a longer term assurance from the government would make a big difference: “Retrofit accreditation is not something that can be gained quickly, and therefore we will not be able to do so before March. If the scheme were extended, we would be more likely to get involved,” he said.

Berry has called on the government to bring forward the £9.2bn of spending pledged in the Conservative manifesto for home energy efficiency, and to cut VAT on home improvements to 5%.

Green campaigners agree. Rebecca Newsom, head of politics at Greenpeace UK, said: “It is critical that the chancellor guarantees financial support over years, not months. The government’s manifesto commitment of £9.2bn should be made good on in full, without delay.”

There are also concerns that the scheme is insufficient in its present form.

Ed Matthew, an associate director of the E3G thinktank, said: “We know that demand for the green home vouchers has hugely outstripped the capacity of industry to respond, resulting in [huge frustration for thousands of households](#) who want to take advantage of the scheme. This is no surprise as the insulation industry almost collapsed after public funding was slashed. What is needed is government commitment to continue and expand this programme, turning it into the UK’s No 1 infrastructure investment priority.”

[Economists](#) and the government’s statutory climate advisers, the [Committee on Climate Change](#), set out in May a variety of “shovel-ready measures” that would reduce

greenhouse gas emissions, make the UK more resilient to the impacts of climate breakdown, and create hundreds of thousands of jobs. These include: investing in renewable energy; setting up a national network of electric vehicle charging points; building out broadband capacity; maintaining and building new flood defences; tree-planting and restoring natural features such as peatland.

Labour has set out proposals for a £30bn economic rescue that would include building an electric vehicle charging network, a national nature service to focus on conservation and bringing forward flood protection schemes. Ed Miliband, shadow business secretary, said: “We need to show through the power of example how the green recovery can act.”

The government this week unveiled a green jobs taskforce, aimed at creating 2m jobs by 2030. A spokesperson said: “We are taking every opportunity to build on the UK’s fantastic track record for tackling climate change as we build back greener from the pandemic.”

Topics

Energy efficiency

[Green economy](#) / [Green politics](#) / [Energy](#) / [Ethical and green living](#) / [Climate change](#) / [news](#)



Most popular

Environment ▶ [Climate change](#) [Wildlife](#) **Energy** [Pollution](#)

News **Opinion** **Sport** **Culture** **Lifestyle**

Sign up for the Guardian Today email

All the day's headlines and highlights from the Guardian, direct to you every morning

Email address

Sign up

[About us](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Complaints & corrections](#)

[All topics](#)

[All writers](#)

[Modern Slavery Act](#)

[SecureDrop](#)

[Work for us](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

[Cookie policy](#)

[Terms & conditions](#)

[Help](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[Guardian Labs](#)

[Search jobs](#)

[Patrons](#)

[Digital newspaper archive](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Back to top](#)



© 2020 Guardian News & Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved. (modern)