

# Count us in: Lessons learnt

NATIONAL  
**HOUSING**  
FEDERATION



# About Count Us In

Count Us In explored how housing associations can help their residents use energy more efficiently through simple changes in their behavior.

Action will help reduce running costs, improve comfort and deliver positive health outcomes, reducing the risk of households having to choose between heating, eating or paying the rent.

For housing associations this will help maximise the value of investment in improving homes and reducing carbon emissions. It could also reduce arrears and voids.



# The pilots

Between March 2012 and October 2014 five housing associations ran pilots, testing a range of techniques to help tenants residents with their energy use.

Each pilot worked with between 50 and 70 households across a range of housing types in urban and rural settings, including retrofitted properties, new build and supported housing.



# The pilots

## Trafford Housing Trust

1960s tower blocks undergoing retrofit, including a new communal heating system.

### Main techniques

- Home advice visits
- Illustrated top-tips guide
- Community events
- Tenant energy champions

"Residents became more comfortable in their homes, sometimes at the expense of energy consumption. Overall, households were low energy users.

The disruption caused by the major retrofit works made engaging residents challenging."

## Helena Partnerships

1960s and 1970s houses and bungalows across St Helens.

### Main techniques

- Smart meter with in-home display
- Home advice visits
- Workshops
- Quarterly information leaflets

"Residents became more confident using their heating efficiently.

Personal contact was the most effective way to engage. Smart meters were also popular, though negative experiences with installation put some residents off."

## Shepherds Bush Housing Group

Victorian street-based properties across West London.

### Main techniques

- Smart meters with in-home display.
- All engagement was delivered virtually, through an online social networking platform.

"The design and functionality of the social networking platform is crucial. Using an existing network or combining it with other online services and activities may generate more use than our stand-alone platform did."

## Yorkshire Housing

A mix of housing types including off-gas houses, new build, and homes recently fitted with heat pumps.

### Main techniques

- Home advice visits
- Personal action plans
- Feedback on consumption
- Advice leaflets and calendar

"Different customers favoured different engagement techniques. Trusted messengers such as neighbourhood wardens play a crucial champion role.

Positive experiences with recent retrofit works provided a good basis for engagement. However, poor experiences with air source heat pumps put some off."

## Aspire Housing

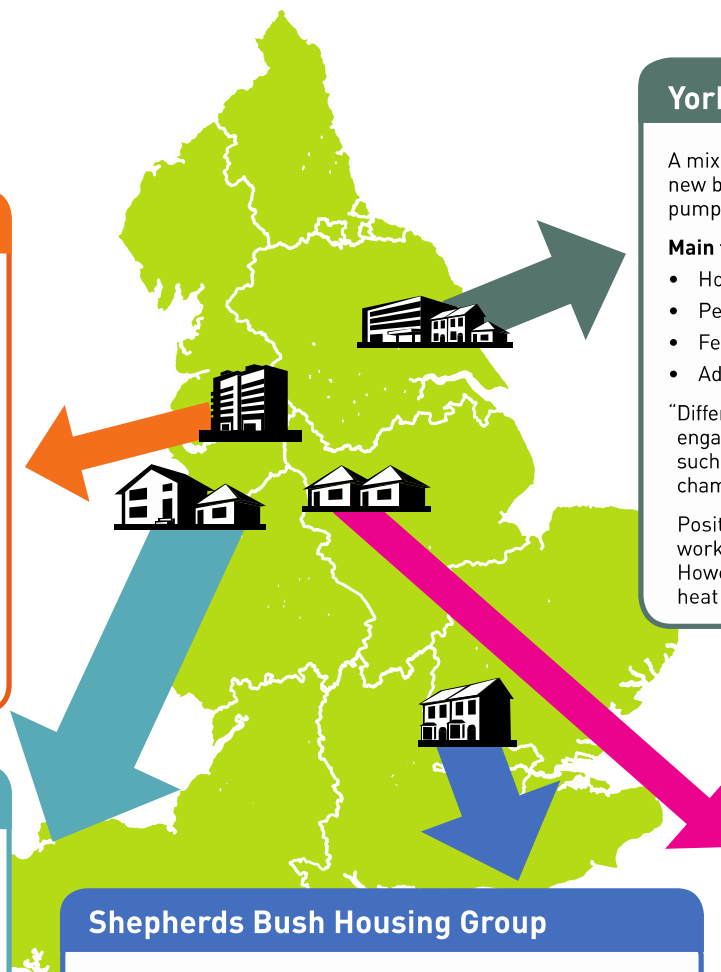
1960s and 1970s bungalows in two sheltered housing schemes, including one retrofitted with heat pumps and photovoltaic panels (PV).

### Main techniques

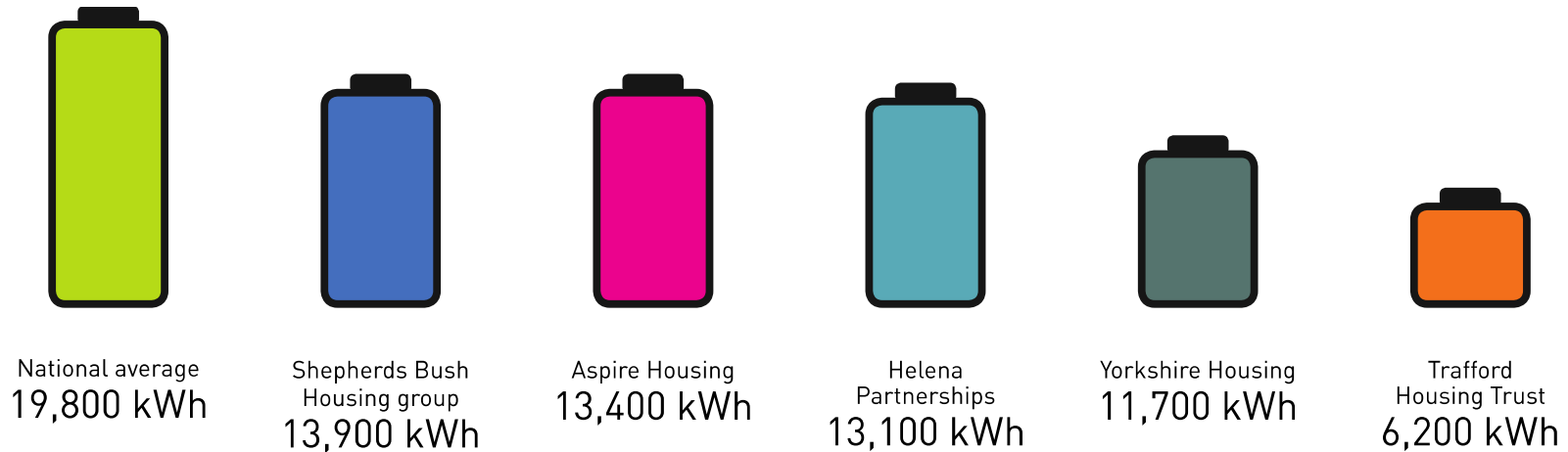
- Home advice visits
- Communal events
- Top-tips leaflet

"To avoid under-heating, residents adopted a zonal approach to controlling temperature and off-set their consumption by better using the free electricity from the PV.

Continual reinforcement of simple messages worked best. Involving scheme managers was key to getting buy-in and maintaining engagement."



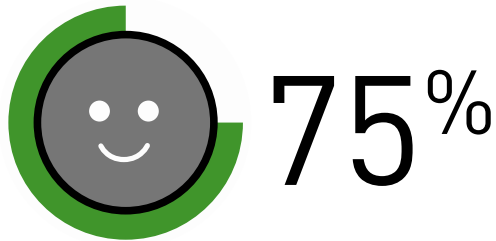
# Energy use



- There was large variation in consumption levels across households.
- Many participants were already low energy users, limiting the scope for further savings. Others were limited by health conditions.
- Because of the higher cost of electricity compared to gas, relatively small changes in appliance use will have a bigger impact on bills, helping to offset the cost of heating.

# Changes in behaviour

## Behaviour Change



**of participants reported making at least one change in their behaviour during the pilot.**

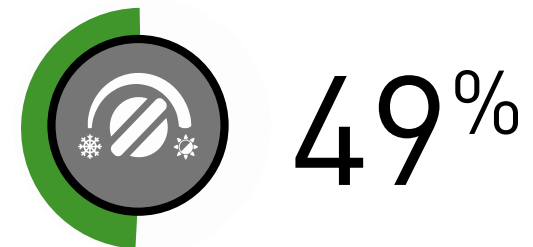
## Appliance Use



**of households made at least one change to their appliance use.**

- For some, changes took time to embed, whilst for others early changes made reversed towards the end of the pilot. This suggests the need for ongoing prompts around appliance use.

## Heating habits



**of households made at least one change to their heating habits.**

- Participants were better able to control how they heated their homes.
- Rates of under-heating more than halved.

# Success factors

- Engagement should not take a one-size-fits-all approach as different participants favoured different techniques.
- How a technique was delivered was key to its effectiveness.
- Key success factors included:



One-to-one engagement with households was most effective.



Engaging with all members of a household.



Coordinating engagement by neighbourhood or scheme.



Locally-based staff such as wardens helped to overcome apathy or scepticism.

# Framing messages

- Keep messages simple, focused and tailored to each household where possible.
- Regular reinforcement of messages helps embed good habits over the long term.
- A focus on staying comfortable and avoiding wasting money rather than making outright savings may be more realistic for many households.
- Highlighting the successes of other, similar households can help motivate change.





# Delivering at scale

- Scaling up engagement to large numbers of residents doesn't have to be overly complex or resource intensive.
- Existing maintenance and outreach activity, such as gas safety inspections and welcome visits, are a way to reach a large number of residents.
- These visits allow one-to-one interaction and don't rely on residents being motivated enough to opt-in, which could miss those most in need.
- Training front-line staff or local volunteers will ensure consistent messages are given and households receive the support they need.
- Working with residents immediately after retrofit can be effective. However ensuring a good experience of the retrofit itself is crucial.
- Consideration should be given to the ease of use of new technology installed so that it isn't seen as a hassle to use.





Additional resources and copies of all  
Count Us In reports are available from  
<http://www.housing.org.uk/countusin>

The National Housing Federation is the voice of affordable housing in England. We believe that everyone should have the home they need at a price they can afford. That's why we represent the work of housing associations and campaign for better housing.

Our members provide two and a half million homes for more than five million people. And each year they invest in a diverse range of neighbourhood projects that help create strong, vibrant communities.