



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

Removing the hassle factor associated with loft insulation: Results of a behavioural trial

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Introduction

Following the publication of the 'Behaviour change and energy use paper'¹ in 2011, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), working in partnership with the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), initiated a series of behavioural trials. Amongst these were a suite of trials designed to test interventions to increase the uptake of energy efficiency measures. It was anticipated that findings from these trials might provide useful evidence on interventions that could help encourage take up of the Green Deal – a scheme launched by DECC in January 2013 that allows householders or businesses to make energy saving improvements to their properties without having to pay all the costs upfront.

One of the trials aimed to test the impact of helping to remove the 'hassle factor' on behavioural change. The insight this trial was based on is that although energy efficiency measures such as loft insulation have been proven to be highly cost-effective and therefore a 'rational' thing to do, in reality there are practical and emotional barriers that prevent some householders from making these improvements. A survey conducted by DECC in 2011² identified lack of money (35%), already doing enough (24%), too much hassle or disruption (15%) and a lack of time (15%) as the main barriers to people making energy efficient home improvements. For loft insulation in particular, the perceived hassle of clearing belongings from the loft area before it can be insulated prevents some customers from taking up this energy saving measure. This trial aims to remove the 'hassle factor' by offering a loft clearance service if customers choose to have loft insulation installed.

Methodology

The trial was conducted in partnership with B&Q and three Local Authorities (LAs) in South London (Kingston, Merton and Sutton). It began in April 2012 and was completed in July 2012. The Global Sustainability Institute (GSI) at Anglia Ruskin University was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the trial.

A quasi experimental approach was used to compare the relative attractiveness of a paid for loft clearance service (at two different cost prices) against a control group receiving a standard loft insulation offer. Details of the three trial groups were as follows:

- Kingston: control group that were offered loft insulation only at a cost of £179
- Merton: intervention group that were offered loft insulation and loft clearance³ at a cost of £369
- Sutton: intervention group that were offered loft insulation and loft clearance at a cost of £450

The main objective of the trial was to determine whether the provision of a loft clearance service alongside a standard loft insulation offer would increase the uptake of loft insulation, relative to a standard loft insulation offer with no loft clearance service. Secondary research questions around what motivated people to take up the loft insulation offer, and what discouraged people from taking up the loft insulation offer were also explored.

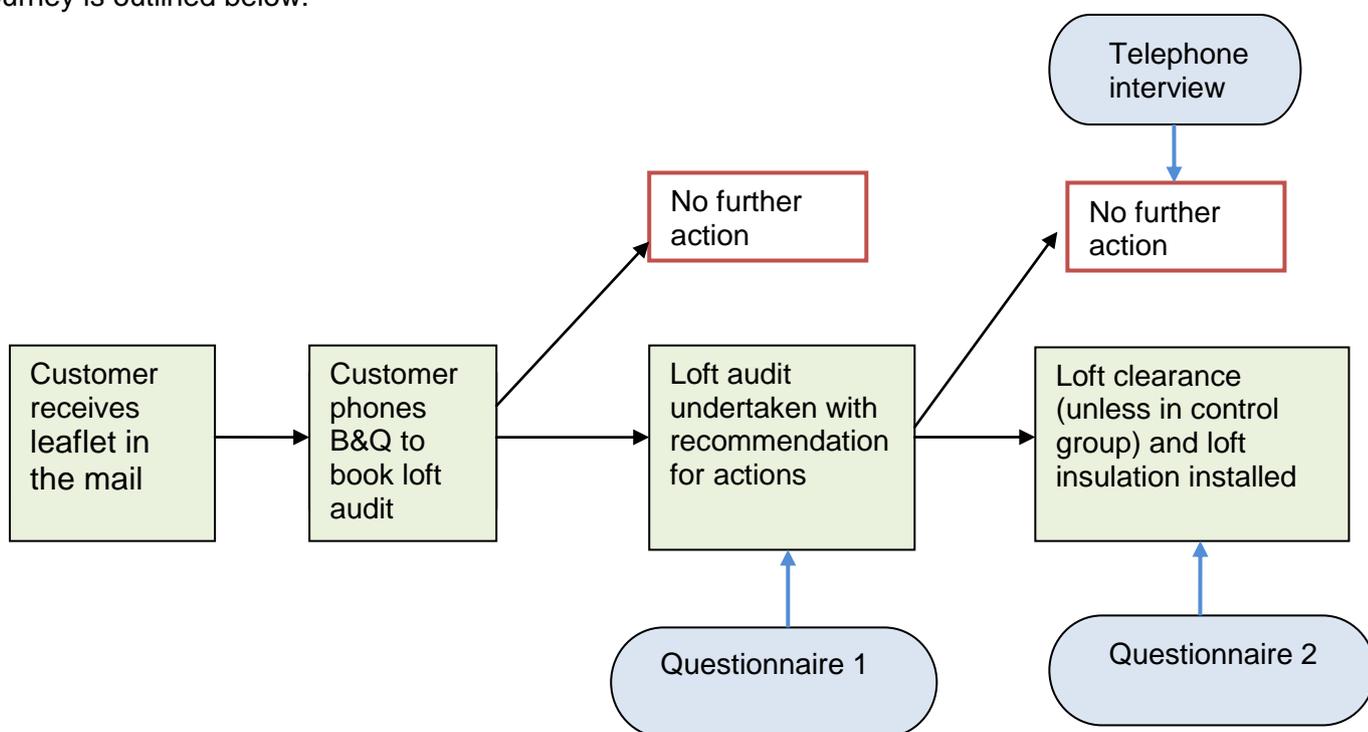
¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/48123/2135-behaviour-change-and-energy-use.pdf

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43014/3586-green-deal-understanding-consumer-resp.pdf

³ The loft clearance service included removal of all householder items from the loft, providing the household with time to sort what they wanted to keep (which was then placed back into the loft on a 5m² insulated loft boards). Residents were offered the opportunity to donate their unwanted goods to a local charity.

The sample was drawn at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) using data from the Neighbourhood Statistics database. As far as possible the sample was designed to ensure that only those households that would be appropriate to receive the offers were targeted. LSOAs were eliminated if they contained a high proportion of households where the property type or tenure was unsuitable e.g. those in flats or rented accommodation. LSOAs were also eliminated if they contained a high proportion of households that were likely to be eligible for free loft insulation under schemes existing at the time such as CERT⁴ e.g. low income households, households with older people, or those on benefits. Having eliminated unsuitable LSOAs, a random selection of LSOAs in each borough was chosen until the desired number of target households was reached. The profile of selected LSOAs across the three areas was compared to ensure that the targeted households were as similar as possible in terms of characteristics which may affect uptake e.g. age, socio-economic status, household size etc. This helped to ensure that, as far as possible, the response rates between regions did not differ because of a reason other than the attractiveness of the offers. Finally, the LSOAs were converted into postcode regions.

A mailshot approach was chosen as a low cost vehicle. Leaflets detailing the relevant offer in each borough were distributed to a total of 72,480 households over the three groups. The basic customer journey is outlined below:



In order to understand more about the people taking up or not taking up the offer and the motivations behind their decisions, questionnaires were administered to participants at two stages. The first questionnaire was administered and collected in person during the loft audit⁵ for those households that responded to the leaflet. A second questionnaire was delivered by post to the same homes that had taken up the loft insulation offer six weeks after the installation. A phone interview was conducted with homes that were audited but chose not to have their lofts insulated.

⁴ Carbon Emissions Reduction Target

⁵ The purpose of the loft audit which took around 30 minutes was to ensure the property was suitable for loft insulation and to provide the customer with feedback on the value of installing it. If the household was interested in proceeding with this, a technical assessment was undertaken at the same time.

Results

Following the 72,480 leaflets that were sent out in total across the three selected Boroughs, 28 households (0.04%) installed loft insulation. Table one below shows the number of phone calls, audits and installations across the three groups.

Table 1

	Kingston	Merton	Sutton	Total
Treatment	Control	Hassle removal with loft clearance at cost price	Hassle removal with loft clearance at retail price	
Offer	Loft insulation & No loft clearance: £179	Loft insulation & Loft clearance: £369	Loft insulation & Loft clearance: £450	
Leaflets distributed	24,673	23,848	24,323	72,480
Phone calls % as proportion of leaflets delivered	8 0.03%	17 0.07%	11 0.05%	36 0.05%
Audits % as proportion of leaflets delivered	8 0.03%	17 0.07%	11 0.05%	36 0.05%
Installations % as proportion of leaflets delivered	3 0.01%	16 0.07%	9 0.04%	28 0.04%
% households continuing from audit to install	38%	94%	82%	78%

Whilst there is some indication that reducing the hassle factor by introducing a loft clearance service appears to increase the uptake of loft insulation (particularly at lower cost price), it is not possible conclude with any certainty whether the trend reflects a 'real' finding for the following reasons:

1. The response to the leaflets was too low to enable robust analysis of the difference between the offers across the three groups.
2. The reason why a larger proportion of households in the control group did not continue from audit to install than in the other groups has not been identified due to the small numbers and lack of follow up information. Had the reason for drop out been due to physical limitations with the property rather than the motivations of the householder then this would have affected the interpretation of the result observed.

In addition to this the number of households having audits and completing the questionnaires was too small to conduct any robust quantitative analysis. A total of 23 participants completed Questionnaire 1 (64% of those having the audit). A total of 5 participants completed Questionnaire 2 (18% of those who

had loft insulation installed) and a total of 5 respondents who didn't proceed after the loft audit were successfully contacted for the telephone interview (63% of those not proceeding from the audit). Given that it was not possible to provide any robust analysis on the characteristics of participants or variables influencing uptake, we do not therefore have an understanding of what motivated households to take up the loft clearance offer or reasons why households had a loft audit but didn't continue to installation.

Conclusion

The aim of this trial was to test the impact of helping to remove the 'hassle factor' through the provision of loft clearance service on the uptake of loft insulation. Whilst a mailshot approach was chosen as a low cost vehicle, the trial highlighted the response rates generated by using leaflets to promote a loft insulation service.

On the basis of the level of uptake in this trial, the numbers are too small to provide any firm conclusions. Offering a loft clearance service to customers may be a useful route for Green Deal providers who are seeking additional ways to encourage uptake of the Green Deal, or other organisations interested in getting consumers to take up energy efficiency measures.

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