Department of Energy & Climate Change

Role of Community Groups in Smart Metering-Related Energy Efficiency Activities

Research conducted by the Energy Saving Trust for DECC

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This report was prepared by the following at the Energy Saving Trust for the Department of Energy and Climate Change:

Claire Murray, Customer and Business Insight Manager
Cate Lyon, Assistant Data Services Manager
Graham Ayling, Community Services Manager
Greg Shreeve, Data Services Manager

Department of Energy and Climate Change
3 Whitehall Place
London
SW1A 2AW

Telephone: 0300 068 4000
Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change

For further information on this document, contact: Smart Meters Programme
Department of Energy and Climate Change
Lower Ground
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

Telephone: 0300 068 5127
Email: phil.nash@decc.gsi.gov.uk

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Executive Summary

DECC is running the Smart Metering Implementation Programme, which will put in place the arrangements for the rollout of smart meters to all homes and smaller business in Great Britain. The full rollout will begin in 2014. Ahead of this, in the Programme's Foundation Stage, the Programme is continuing to expand its evidence base, including through research and trials.

DECC's consultation on smart metering consumer engagement[1] noted that energy suppliers will have a key role in consumer engagement, but it also noted that some interventions may be better delivered by third parties such as community organisations. However, the Programme lacked detailed information on the types of community initiatives that are already in place and which tools and techniques work best for the audiences being addressed, to help inform the design of the community element of the consumer engagement strategy.

To help improve evidence in this area, DECC commissioned the Energy Saving Trust to research the potential role of communities in the smart meter roll-out.

The study had three overarching research questions:

1. What lessons can be learnt from community projects current and past to inform how the smart meter roll-out could involve communities?

2. What are the best approaches to involve communities and the energy professionals they work with in the smart meter roll-out?

3. How can community outreach work in a non-regional, supplier-led roll-out?

In order to answer these questions, the Energy Saving Trust carried out three stages of research:

1. Desk research to understand the existing material on the topic and how this study could build on the information;

2. Primary research data collection - using an online survey - with a large sample of communities, and energy professionals working with communities, to gather a broad picture of what projects have been undertaken and how communities could be involved in the future smart meter roll-out;

3. Primary research data collection - using in-depth telephone interviews with key communities and energy professionals working with communities, to understand what has worked, what hasn't and which lessons can be learnt for the smart meter roll-out.

Using information analysed from 178 responses to the online survey and 54 in-depth telephone interviews with community groups volunteers and professionals working with community groups, plus findings from the desk research, we have come to the following conclusions in relation to DECC's three questions:

[1] DECC, 2012, Government Response to the Consultation on the Consumer Engagement Strategy

1. **What lessons can be learnt from community projects current and past to inform how the smart meter roll-out could involve communities?**

- **Existing community groups have experience engaging with people in their communities.** They know the issues that are relevant to people and stakeholders in the local area, and have experience in what works well (or not) with engaging people in their area.

- **Some community groups feel that smart meters (and in particular the accompanying in-home displays) will help householders to connect with messages the groups themselves are trying to promote**, such as improved awareness of energy use, behaviour change to reduce energy use, or generating interest in renewable energy.

- **'Green' community groups would be good vehicles for engaging people on the smart meter roll-out, but should not be the only vehicles.** 'Green' community groups should not be expected to reach all members of society, as they typically attract people who are already engaged with environmental and/or energy efficiency issues (although they do make an effort to be accessible to all).

- **Communities with a simple purpose are often seen as more successful than those with much larger and more ambitious plans,** as were communities with members who had 'key skills' for sustainable energy project delivery – such as administration, procurement, project management, budgeting etc. acquired from their professional lives.

- **Energy professionals were on the whole positive about working with communities.** There were some general concerns over the time and resource it takes to involve communities. However, they saw communities as a key part of the relationship with the consumer to build trust and engage, target and market in their 'known area'.

- **Local authorities were seen as an important aid to success of community projects,** providing significant extra resource. Working productively with community groups was also seen to bring benefits to the local authority itself for example through providing additional volunteer resource to work alongside Council funded sustainability activity, providing local endorsement of Council energy efficiency activity and feeding in valuable local knowledge.

2. **What are the best approaches to involve communities and the energy professionals they work with in the smart meter roll-out?**

Key points where community activity might add value to the smart meter roll out are:

- **Awareness raising** within their own community, providing a local perspective alongside national promotion and media coverage.

- **Keeping up the momentum** and motivation for people to continue using their smart meters beyond the initial "honeymoon period".

- **Providing practical help and support** to householders – e.g. basic advice on reading the monitor and tips on how to save energy. It was recommended that those trained or who already lived with a smart meter would be most effective at this, and several

community groups interviewed expressed the need/desire for more training themselves before they could deliver this.

- **Handholding** householders through the process of getting and living with a smart meter.

In terms of successfully engaging community groups, and engaging householders through community groups:

- **A focus on organically-formed communities - where possible - may be preferable to seeking to establish new groups.**

- **DECC should work with existing community energy networks** (e.g. Transition Network, Low Carbon Communities Network and the umbrella Communities and Climate Action Alliance) to communicate out to potential "early adopters" of community activity on smart meters.

In addition:

- **Communities are keen to work in partnership with other organisations where doing so brings them benefits.** For example, working with local authorities can lend formal recognition and working with housing associations to reach their tenants may increase the reach of community groups into the local community.

- **Community groups need/want more information on smart meters before they can act to engage others with the smart meter roll-out**. A commonly-expressed desire was for materials to help community groups communicate about the smart meter roll-out, such as tools/templates, basic energy efficiency advice and information about smart meters in 'householder friendly' language.

- **Over the longer term, data from smart meters could contribute to more accurate, regularly updated information on energy use and carbon emissions at community level.** As the roll-out will not be geographic this is a longer term aim and could only achieve scale once a large number of smart meters are installed. However, sharing data could be used as part of a package of incentives for communities to drive early smart meter take up in their area, particularly within possible area-based pilots.

3. How can community outreach work in a non-regional, supplier-led roll-out?

- **Communities could provide the 'trust' sometimes considered lacking in the current relationship between consumer and energy supplier.**

- **For communities to engage fully they will need to work alongside or partner with energy suppliers.** Partnerships seem to work better where communities and energy suppliers were able to agree needs and roles at an early stage. A follow up action to this study could be to begin work on facilitating agreement between community groups and energy suppliers on how they can work together and what each can expect from the other.

- **The non-regional, supplier-led nature of the smart meter roll-out was felt by respondents to present some challenges for communities, but also some opportunities.** The long timescale and the supplier-led nature means community groups

may struggle to support all householders in their area throughout the roll-out period. However the long roll-out also allows time for establishing demonstration/pilot projects. The large number of suppliers means community groups may struggle to work with all the energy suppliers active in their area, and may have to focus on working with one or two. Alternatively groups could choose not to partner with particular suppliers, but to position themselves as impartial advisors to their community or working with a local authority instead of directly with energy suppliers.

- **A pilot programme could be established early in the roll out of smart meters**, offering the opportunity for communities to bid to run projects to promote uptake of smart meters in their area. The aim of this would be to pilot different approaches and activities with a view to identifying what activities could be most effective for the wider roll out. The pilot could also help to establish expectations around the possible impact that communities could have on the roll out.

It should be noted that this research mostly focussed on community groups involved in or interested in environmental issues such as sustainability or climate change. More research would be required to fully explore the roles that other ‘community’ groups or structures might be able to play in the smart meter roll-out.

Energy Saving Trust notes that, since the field work for this research was completed, DECC has published the Government Response to the Consultation on Smart Metering Consumer Engagement. This notes the important role of community organisations in delivering effective consumer engagement and the role of the Central Delivery Body in working with third parties, such as community groups, to engage consumers.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

This is the report on research into the role of community groups in smart metering-related energy efficiency activities.

DECC is running the Smart Metering Implementation Programme, which will put in place the arrangements for the rollout of smart meters to all homes and smaller business in Great Britain. The full rollout will begin in 2014. Ahead of this, in the Programme's Foundation Stage, the Programme is continuing to expand its evidence base, including through research and trials.

DECC's consultation on smart metering consumer engagement[2] noted that energy suppliers will have a key role in consumer engagement, but it also noted that some interventions may be better delivered by third parties such as community organisations. However, the Programme lacked detailed information on the types of community initiatives that are already in place, which tools and techniques work best for the audiences being addressed, to help inform the design of the community element of the consumer engagement strategy.

This study will, therefore, inform the wider learning and research during the Foundation Stage of the Smart Metering Programme, which should help DECC to understand the best approaches to engagement and contribute to the further development of the consumer engagement strategy.

Through structured research into community activity, including Energy Saving Trust's own experience and that of the local communities and other parties it engages with, this research will provide the initial insight required by DECC to inform the community element of the smart metering consumer engagement strategy, and help to identify potential future preparatory work required.

The study has three overarching research questions:

1. What lessons can be learnt from community projects current and past to inform how the smart meter roll-out could involve communities?

2. What are the best approaches to involve communities and the energy professionals they work with in the smart meter roll-out?

3. How can community outreach work in a non-regional, supplier-led roll-out?

1.2 Note on terminology and definitions

There is sometimes confusion about the terms "smart meter", energy monitor" and "in-home display". Throughout this report, we have used the term "smart meter" to describe the type of metering system that will be the subject of the Government's planned smart meter roll-out, that is a system that includes an electricity or gas meter plus and in-home display which will provide

[2] DECC, 2012, Smart Metering Implementation Programme - Consultation on the Consumer Engagement Strategy

near real-time information to consumers on their energy consumption. “Energy monitor” is used in the report to describe portable monitors which typically provide consumers with data on just their electricity use (but are not linked to smart meters). They usually include a clip-on device which is attached to a meter cable and sends the information to the monitor located in the home. The term “in-home display” is used by some parties to describe “energy monitors” but in this report we have used it to describe the displays which are linked to smart meters (except on occasion where we are directly quoting from another report which has used the term synonymously with energy monitors).

The following **definitions** have been used in relation to communities and the groups that are the subject of this research:

Community Group/Organisation – Community Group is defined as a group of people who have identified themselves as having shared objectives to achieve a common good for its members (and any community represented), and have established themselves collectively for the purposes of achieving the objectives. Community groups/organisations are frequently a vehicle for reaching “the community” as described below.

The Community – Refers in this report to the population of a given geographical area. . Community groups communicate with “the community” through a range of different channels including, face to face meetings, other community organisations and networks, door knocking, local schools and Parish Councils as well as local media.

Energy Professional – Refers to individuals engaging with communities on energy as part of a professional role rather than members of community groups engaged with energy on a voluntary basis. This broad definition is intended to make the distinction between those with experience of working with communities through providing third party support, evaluating/studying their activity or partnering with them and those who are actually members of community groups. Note that there is some crossover between “Energy Professionals” and “Community” representatives where people with an energy related career volunteer with a community energy group as well. Respondents to the survey were asked to self-define as an energy professional or community representative depending on which was the dominant role.

Community Projects - Projects must have an emphasis on increased local community ownership, leadership, accountability and/or control, as well as the local community benefiting collectively from the outcomes (e.g. revenue-generation, energy saving, reduced costs of energy, investment return etc.).

2. Research approach

2.1 Background

DECC commissioned the Energy Saving Trust to research the potential role of communities in the smart meter roll-out.

The study had three overarching research questions:

1. **What lessons can be learnt from community projects current and past to inform how the smart meter roll-out could involve communities?**

2. **What are the best approaches to involve communities and the energy professionals they work with in the smart meter roll-out?**

3. **How can community outreach work in a non-regional, supplier-led roll-out?**

Sitting under these two overarching questions were further detailed research questions:

- What types of community-based energy saving projects are currently (or have recently) taken place?
- What is the extent of such projects?
- What are the drivers and motivations for community groups and their audiences to get involved?
- What are the current roles that community groups /energy professionals play in promoting energy efficiency?
- To what extent do they currently work with other stakeholders, and how successful has this been?
- What is the extent to which such projects involve smart metering/energy monitors/real-time displays?
- What has worked to date, what hasn't worked?
- What types of roles can community groups play in future in smart metering consumer engagement?
- What are the barriers to community groups engaging people in the smart meter roll-out?
- What support, advice or skills are currently lacking, which community groups and other parties feel they need in this area?

This research study comprises three stages:

1. **Desk research** to understand the existing material on the topic and how this study could build on the information;

2. **Primary research data collection** - using an **online survey** - with a large sample of communities, and energy professionals working with communities, to gather a broad picture of what projects have been undertaken and how communities could be involved in the future smart meter roll-out;

3. **Primary research data collection** - using **in-depth telephone interviews** with key communities and energy professionals working with communities, to understand what has worked, what hasn't and which lessons can be learnt for the smart meter roll-out.

2.2 Desk Research

Desk research was carried out using existing sources of information and documentation around community sustainable energy projects. This element of the project was not intended to be a comprehensive review of all relevant evidence in this area but to:

- draw from existing insight and enable the study to build on this;
- avoid duplication of existing work through this study;
- highlight gaps and areas where more insight is needed.

Literature was sourced from:

- The Energy Saving Trust's evaluations of the Green Communities programme
- Energy Saving Trust evaluation of other communities-related programmes (e.g. CAfE,Green Neighbourhoods)
- External community group research within the public domain, including:
    - Information from DECC's Low Carbon Communities Challenge
    - Evaluation of the Big Energy Shift (DECC, Welsh Assembly Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and Sciencewise-ERC)
    - Evaluation of NESTA's 'Big Green Challenge'
    - Information from the Pathfinder programme of the Welsh government
    - Evaluation of the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund

A full list of the 24 studies considered is given in Appendix 1.

2.3 Online survey and in-depth telephone interviews

To provide DECC with a flavour of the nature and extent of community energy efficiency activities, relevant to smart meters and energy monitoring taking place across GB, an online survey was conducted with both communities and energy professionals working with communities. The survey was developed using some of the findings from the desk research.

The Energy Saving Trust drew its sample from the Green Communities Database which it hosts. The Green Communities Database is thought to be the largest database of UK communities and energy professionals working on community energy projects and is comprised of organisations that contacted or were involved with the "Green Communities" and "Community Action for Energy" programmes. This was thought to be the most cost effective route to sourcing communities working on sustainable energy - and preferably smart meter - projects. The online survey is a self-selecting approach and therefore results may include bias. It should be noted that therefore, results are not representative for GB community groups.

The Energy Saving Trust developed the online survey questions in conjunction with DECC. A copy can be found in Appendix 2.

The survey was distributed to:

- 2,179 active contacts on Energy Saving Trust's unique Green Community Database of communities, and energy professionals working with communities, across the UK
- 239 Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) programme contacts[3]
- 286 energy professional and local authority contacts in Scotland
- The survey was also communicated to established community networks through Energy Saving Trust's partnerships and known contacts to ensure wide communication; for example, the Low Carbon Community Network, Community Energy Scotland and regional networks across the UK
- The survey was also tweeted and blogged about by Energy Saving Trust and follow-up reminders were sent to all original recipients asking them to complete the survey.

The total number of people contacted directly about the survey was 2704. In practice this information is likely to have been cascaded to others through community networks but, for the purpose of this report, 2704 has been treated as the base sample size. Further detail on the makeup of this sample is available in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

The number of online surveys completed in response was 178. This gives a response rate to the online survey of 7%.

54 in-depth telephone interviews were also completed, comprising:

- 32 communities
- 22 energy professionals working with communities.

These were drawn from: contacts suggested by the desk research; contacts the Energy Saving Trust developed over its years of working with green community groups; and respondents to the online survey who had given their permission to be contacted for a more in-depth discussion of their answers.

[3] http://www.greencommunitiescc.org.uk/

3. Desk research

Desk research was carried out to ensure that the team was aware of all major literature on the topic before the research tools were finalised. This was not intended to provide detailed answers to the research questions, or provide a comprehensive review of evidence in this area. Instead its aim was to ensure that the surveys and interviews did not duplicate or replicate any existing studies. For these reasons, the findings must be treated with caution.

Literature was included from a wide range of bodies, both academic and business focused; and of both existing and historic community based research. Appendix 1 contains a full list of sources.

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this desk research, and therefore the structure this review follows, was to summarise:

- the recent sustainable energy projects – where possible, with a focus on smart meters or energy monitors - delivered by community groups and energy professionals working with communities;
- the lessons learnt from these projects;
- the roles that communities and energy professionals working with communities played;
- the current viewpoints and opinions about how communities and energy professionals could play a part – and what part – in the forthcoming supplier-led smart meter roll-out.

There are a large number of community groups working on sustainable energy related projects. The Energy Saving Trust houses one of the largest and most comprehensive databases of community groups and related energy professionals working with these groups. There are over 3,000 members on its database (Energy Saving Trust, Green Communities Evaluation Summary, 2010). The Energy Saving Trust has conducted research and evaluation surveys with the Green Community database of members annually from 2005-2010.

The first part (sections 3.2 through 3.6) of the desk research focuses on research from the Energy Saving Trust's Green Communities database. The evidence is from the most recent Energy Saving Trust community research and evaluation undertaken in 2010[4] (unless otherwise stated as being from a different study) and provides a broad picture of sustainable energy-related community projects in the UK. Where external sources of research complement or contrast to this Energy Saving Trust research it has been noted. The second half is based mainly on external sources of research drawn from the public domain and reviewed by Energy Saving Trust.

[4] Energy Saving Trust Green Community Evaluation 2010, data from Databuild Research Ltd

3.2 Communities working on sustainable energy projects

The majority of projects undertaken by the Green Communities – and associated professionals – in 2010-11 evaluated by the Energy Saving Trust are recorded as awareness raising, marketing/communications and behaviour change projects.

- 80% of members had conducted a communication / awareness raising campaign.
- 59% of those undertaking communications had communicated to individuals about reducing energy consumption through behaviour change.

Smaller proportions had been involved in community-based actions to:

- install energy efficiency measures in homes (31% of community groups and 19% of professionals)
- install renewable energy measures in individual properties (10% of community groups and 14% of energy professionals)
- install renewable energy measures in community buildings (18% of community groups and 20% of energy professionals)
- construct community scale renewable energy installations (2% of community groups and 8% of professionals).

The desk research of other projects was focussed on communities working in similar areas, including encouraging household behaviour change, as these projects are most similar to smart-metering related energy-efficiency activities. However, many community groups in the UK are involved in a variety of other 'sustainability' projects, including but not limited to: sustainable transport; local food growing; encouraging use of green spaces etc.

3.3 Who are the community groups?

There are a mixture of both community groups and energy professionals working with community groups on the Energy Saving Trust community database (table 1). The information in this section is drawn from the Green Communities evaluation which reviewed information in the database and also carried out telephone surveys with a 10% sample of the database.

Table 1: The location and classification of contacts on the Energy Saving Trust community database				
	Community groups	**Energy professionals**	**TOTAL**	**Community groups: energy professionals**
England	1,971	1,022	2,993	66%:34%
Scotland	132	43	175	75%:25%
Wales	134	51	185	72%:28%
Northern Ireland	28	10	38	74%:26%
TOTAL	2,265	1,126	3,391	67%:33%

The community groups themselves are generally very locally focussed, and vary in size:

- 91% do not look beyond the local level, 7% operate at a regional level and 2% operate at a national level. Therefore the vast majority are limited in their sphere of operation.
- 28% of community groups had less than ten members. Over half of community group representatives said that their group had more than twenty members and 37% said that their group had more than fifty members.
- It is worth noting that different groups have different definitions of 'members'. For example, many groups have a core of active members with a much wider group that are communicated to and may be supportive of the group's aims but rarely participate in project activities or meetings.

The majority of community group member organisations were either interest groups/charities with an environmental focus (28%), or interest groups/charities with a different key focus but an interest in environmental matters.

- 27% of groups were specifically linked by their geography - e.g. Transition Towns or village hall groups.
- 13% were a church or faith group.
- 9% were a group linked to children e.g. schools or scouts halls.

Motivations and understanding of sustainability/energy:

- 36% of community group representatives said that their job / background was primarily related to environmental / sustainable energy issues.
- 58% felt they had a good or full understanding of sustainable energy, 12% felt they had very little. Larger groups were more likely to feel they had good or full understanding.

Knowledge and skills of groups:

- 71% of groups feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to take action, indicating a very confident membership. When asked what skills they felt these were, respondents cited project management, communication / persuasion skills and management of funds.
- Those groups that felt they needed to develop more skills said that these were around persuasion, bidding for funding and conducting energy audits of buildings to understand appropriate action.

The wider desk research of community projects indicates that the majority of active energy-saving community groups tends to be of a certain 'type of community' or of a similar profile: affluent / middle class and with members who show a strong interest in environmental or sustainability issues. One project review noted: *'Respondents are a self-selected group that might be expected to exhibit a higher degree of environmental sympathy than the population in general*' and that *'the majority of those recruited [to a trial of energy monitors and smart meters] were owner-occupiers living in 3 bed semi's or terraces*.[5] This suggests members of such groups are also more likely to have savings or available income to take action on energy saving measures.

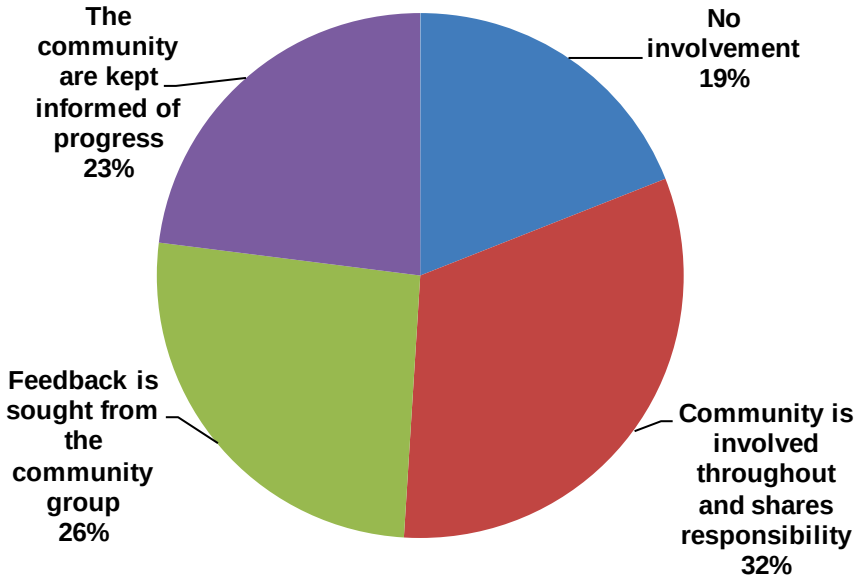
3.4 Who are the energy professionals working with communities?

There is limited information and research in the public domain around energy professionals working with communities with the exception of the Evaluation of the Green Communities programme by Databuild on behalf of Energy Saving Trust[6] which found that:

- There has been a substantial growth in associations supporting voluntary or community groups seen over the years, from 23% in 2009 to 33% in 2010.
- Energy suppliers and local authorities / housing associations each comprised 23% of energy professional members.
- Consultants comprised 13% and builders / installers comprised 2%. The remainder of energy professional members were private companies and colleges.
- A small proportion of energy professional members had not worked with any community groups in the past year.
- 68% of energy professionals had worked with between one and ten community groups, whilst 23% had worked with more than ten. Consultants and associations of voluntary / community organisations were those most likely to have worked with more than ten groups. The survey sample included a number of energy NGOs whose work focuses on supporting community approaches to energy.
- How energy professionals involve community groups varies (figure 1).

[5] Evaluation of Blacon LCCC (final interim report), University of Chester
[6] Energy Saving Trust and Databuild, 2011, Evaluation of Green Communities.

Figure 1: Extent to which energy professionals involve the community groups they work with on energy saving projects. From the Green Communities evaluation.[7]



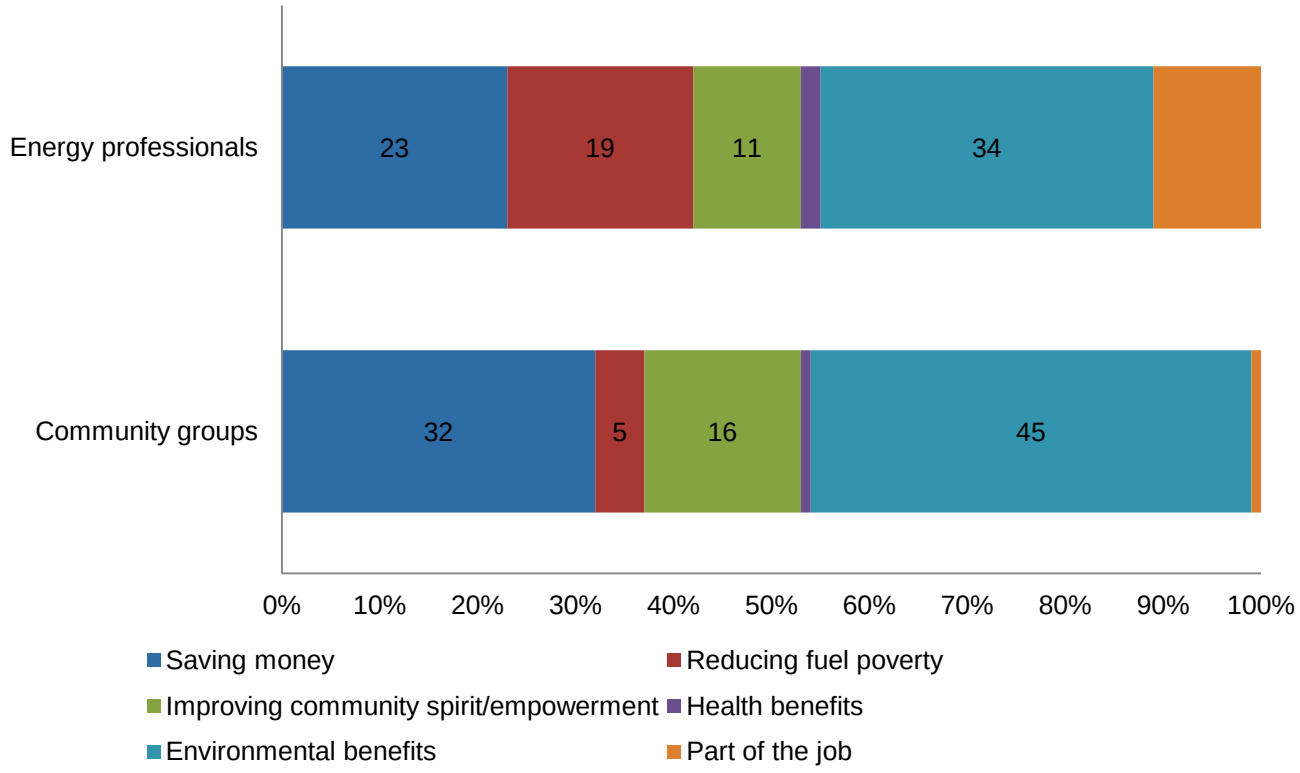
Base: 150 "energy professionals" on the Green Communities database, interviewed as part of the Green Communities evaluation, selected as a representative sample of 1126 energy professionals on the database.

3.5 Motivations for action

- Amongst both community groups and energy professionals, environmental motivations were most prevalent (though more so for community groups) whilst financial benefits were important to just over half of both member types.
- Energy professionals (especially local authorities and housing associations) were more likely to be motivated by reducing fuel poverty and because community-based sustainable energy projects are part of their job.
- Of their various motivations, all members were asked what their principal motivation was for taking action. The primary motivation for both communities and energy professionals was saving money (figure 2).

[7] Energy Saving Trust and Databuild, 2011, Green Communities (previously CAfE) evaluation and research. 2005-2010.

Figure 2: Primary motivations for taking action (N=3,391). From Green Communities evaluation.[8]



3.6 Factors affecting propensity to take action

Based on EST Green Communities evaluations, those community groups most likely to be taking action were groups with experience, expertise, resources and a motivation beyond cost or energy savings. The most successful groups tend to be embedded within their community rather than created for a single project. For example:

- Interest groups / charities / NGOs with a key focus on environmental issues
- Community groups with a larger number of members
- Community groups working with energy professionals such as NGOs/charities, local authority staff and energy suppliers
- Community groups where the members have a professional background in sustainable energy and or managerial skills from their day job they can employ in their community projects
- Groups with a high understanding and knowledge of sustainable energy and the of actions they could take
- Community members where there is a core group who are committed and passionate

Research from the EDRP trials[9] outlined that 'a group bound only by energy saving finds it difficult to engage a large proportion of the community, especially if it is newly formed for the

[8] Energy Saving Trust Green Communities (previously CAfE) evaluation and research. 2005-2010.

trial and therefore has no existing identity in the community.' The research suggested it was better to: 'Start with the community, not the environment. There will be people of local influence and reputation, whether in official positions or not. It is easier to give them an understanding of energy issues than to give energy enthusiasts a local network.'

3.7 Barriers to action

The desk research identified a number of factors commonly identified as barriers to more effective community action on energy.

Barriers listed by communities commonly include:

- Difficulty sourcing funds for projects
- Time
- People resources
- Engaging more widely in the community and reaching outside the core community group
- Planning permission barriers
- Technical knowledge on project implementation
- Organisational capacity/project management
- Concerns over privacy and data protection

The research in the public domain reiterates these areas as key barriers to community projects being successful:

- Organisational capacity, capability and finance are significant barriers to realising the potential of community led initiatives.
- Community volunteers lack time and resources
- Community groups need support to disseminate findings to other community groups
- Communities are not being effectively engaged by local authorities or energy companies. This can be due to perceived clashes of culture, and community concerns about being 'squeezed out' by more powerful partners or about projects being developed for commercial profit rather than community benefit.
- Communities need more help accessing the mainstream energy programmes

3.8 Communities and smart meters

There is limited quantitative research evidence around the impact of smart meter or energy monitor community projects which has been written up and published.

In part, this is because typically smart meters or energy monitors have often been included within wider 'behaviour change' / awareness raising projects aimed at helping people to reduce their energy use in the home, of which the meters or monitors are just one part.

Where impact has been quantified it is still unclear and often difficult for the community to isolate and attribute the impact as a result of the smart meter / energy monitor element of the programme.

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[9] Smart meter programme: preparing for evaluation. Learning from EDRP. AECOM

Where evaluation of smart meter / energy monitor projects has occurred, it has generally been done by a professional or 3rd sector organisation. Where quantitative results are reported, it is not always clear what impact is directly related to smart meters / energy monitors alone, compared to the other advice and/or help that accompanied them.

One example of a community project focusing on energy monitors is the Climate Friendly Communities Review by Marches Energy Agency for Energy Saving Trust. This study interviewed active community energy groups about the work they had carried out under the "Climate Friendly Communities" programme. The study noted one example from Rauceby in Lincolnshire where 51 households within a community of 215 borrowed a smart meter and completed a follow-up survey (47 respondents) with the following results[10]:

- 90% of participants believed that a community's combined efforts to save energy could make a difference to global climate change.
- 90% found the trial [of energy monitors] worthwhile.
- 97% thought that they made more effort to save energy after the trial.
- 75% understood which of their gadgets and appliances used the most energy.
- 81% stated that the trial had helped them understand their household's impact on the environment.
- 100% stated that they would like their community to continue to be involved in energy saving or 'green' initiatives.
- The number of households turning their electrical items off standby stayed the same at approximately 78% (all or most of them).
- 87.5% of volunteers stated that after the trial it would be a key priority to find out how energy efficient a new purchase would be. Before the trial the figure was 80%.

This finding is in line with evidence from DECC's own research into the benefits of smart meters:

- '*57% of those with an In-Home Display (IHD) agreed they felt more in control of their energy bills, although 15% disagreed. 69% believed the IHD will help them reduce what they spend on electricity.*'[11]
- Other 'spill over' benefits were also noted: "*A substantial minority described how economising efforts and habits had generalised. For example, they might have started by reducing unnecessary energy use in the home, but then found they became sensitive to unnecessary water use (whether metered or not), wasted food, car journeys that could be shared and so on*."[12]

3.9 Communication and smart meters

The desk research identified a number of findings that would suggest that communities could play a role in communication around smart meters and in embedding their use for household energy management, such as:

- In one study of energy monitors supported by a web portal, 40% of participants (out of those who responded to the final questionnaire) said that they had shared monitoring

[10] www.raucebyonline.co.uk/rlfi-casestudies.htm.
[11] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters
[12] DECC Smart meter research into public attitudes (qualitative research)

information with others. This suggests participation is in itself a prompt to influence others towards environmentally motivated behaviour.[13]

- 55% of people with energy monitors have used them to influence others in their household to reduce energy use.[14]
- "*Seeing the consumptions of people I know made the experience more real*".[15]
- Currently, media (18%) and energy companies (17%) are main sources of awareness about smart meters; 'word of mouth' was fourth most common answer at 17%. And 24% of people said they would rely on word of mouth if they wanted more information about smart meters or in-home displays[16] - indicating a good potential role for communities (either environmental or otherwise) to act as a source of information.

Where energy monitors were offered to householders by community projects, householders are reported to generally be keen to take them when offered free on loan or for pilots/trials.

- "*Participants are often willing to take energy monitors out of interest, particularly if they are concerned with making financial savings*"[17]

However one-to-one advice and/or home visits were found to be a good way to encourage people to actually agree to take one home: in one project which analysed methods of delivery, the conversion rate between signing up to show initial interest, and getting an energy monitor fitted, was higher from home energy visits and small events than large events (40% conversion rate vs 17%).[18]

3.10 Local authorities

Local authorities have consistently shown an eagerness and commitment to participate in carbon reduction and fuel poverty schemes over the last decade against a continually changing performance assessment framework and policy landscape. The high level of local authority participation in the community projects identified within this study and those referenced in the desk research suggests that many authorities feel that partnering with community groups can be an effective way to deliver local carbon reduction activity.

The trust placed in local authorities by the public means that energy suppliers have actively sought to develop CERT, CESP and Green Deal schemes in partnership with them. This element of trust is expected to be particularly important in the smart meter roll out with the local authorities trusted brand aiding the cost effectiveness of delivery.

- *"There is a very significant role that Local Authorities, the Energy Saving Trust and other organisations can play in supporting this, but their response is patchy and lacks the maturity and resourcing needed to really help. Such organisations understand the bigger picture and have access to a range of funding that community groups can only dream about at the moment, but lack the community access which the groups can bring and*

[13] DEHEMS. Note that this study was a community of interest formed through recruitment for the trial, rather than a geographical community
[14] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters
[15] DEHEMS
[16] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters
[17] Community Pathways
[18] Nielston Development Trust; report for Community Energy Scotland and the Development Trusts Association Scotland

which will develop. So, at the moment there is a real gap between the rhetoric on climate change and delivery on the ground. Key to success in this will be a greater willingness to work with people and ideas and in ways that perhaps we don't at the moment. Greater communication and planning would have made the energy monitor trial more successful, will help cross those fault lines that currently run through communities between outsiders and new comers and between different cultural groups."[19]

Provided they have the necessary resources, councils can:

- Help to add rigour and proper evaluation to projects (case study 1)
- Reach groups other than typical 'greens' (case study 2)

Case study 1: North Kesteven District Council [20]

In Rauceby, Lincolnshire, a slightly different approach to an energy monitor trial was followed with North Kesteven District Council, providing much more direction and support to the community. This resulted in a well-managed project with before and after questionnaires being completed. Over 50 homes from a community of 215 borrowed an energy monitor with the follow up survey reporting that 90% found the smart meters useful and 97% reporting that they were making more of an effort to save energy after the trial.

Case study 2: Eco Easterside[21]

Eco Easterside is a project in the Tees Valley where Middlesbrough Council and Middlesbrough Environment City are working to raise awareness among residents to reduce carbon emissions from domestic housing and public buildings and facilities; reduce energy use and save residents on household bills. Easterside is in the top 20% of deprived areas in England. 600 domestic properties have been supplied with energy display monitors and energy advice and community champions are being trained to spread advice on energy saving to other residents.

- However, it is notable that the local authority is currently quoted by very few people as somewhere they would go for more information about smart meters (2%)[22].

3.11 Gaps in community skills

There have been a number of areas highlighted in the research that are perceived as the skills that communities lack, and/or the gaps in the support provided or available for communities (which is one reason why community projects are sometimes unsuccessful).

The following 'gaps' have been identified through the desk research:

[19] Climate Friendly Communities Review by Marches Energy Agency for EST
[20] Climate Friendly Communities Review by Marches Energy Agency for EST. Rauceby has published the trial results on its website at: www.raucebyonline.co.uk/rlfi-casestudies.htm.
[21] http://www.menvcity.org.uk/Eco%20Easterside.htm
[22] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters

- **Technical advice and guidance**:
    - ‘*Saving energy can be a complex business, both in the application of technology and in changing behaviour. While leadership should be local, it is also important to have access to high quality advice and guidance, to make the most of the available resources*’[23].

- **Support in making appropriate promotional material**:
    - ‘*Websites and newsletters can be useful – if not essential – tools for coordinating and supporting activities but they are passive means of engaging people. The biggest risk is a promotional activity that backfires because its message or style creates antagonism, embarrassment or confusion*.[24]‘
    - ‘*Not just the actions but also the promotional activities need to be relevant and attractive. In the SSE trials, some of the more successful activities were part of some wider event that people would be attending for other reasons, not events specifically about saving energy (e.g. local fairs)”*.[25]

- **Digital and online information** would provide a valuable, tangible support for communities to help them disseminate information around smart meters – but communities may need assistance in establishing these.
    - A Facebook App proved to be popular with some of the users in the DEHEMS trial. ‘*This was extremely useful and quite motivating*,’ commented one of the Manchester users. This was echoed by another Facebook user in Bristol who said, ‘*I use Facebook a lot, so didn't have to go to a separate web site to see DEHEMS data*.’[26]
    - If going for IT support functions such as online platforms for viewing and sharing meter data, communities may well need help/skills to develop these: learning from DEHEMS is that ‘*In ICT projects like DEHEMS priority must be given to enhancing the user experience. The golden rule is to keep things simple. Ideally the equipment should be ‘plug and play.’ Where it isn’t, an efficient installation service and a help desk should be provided in order to maintain enthusiasm for the project. Once the initial installation has taken place users need to be able to use it with confidence*.[27]’ It is unlikely that many communities currently have the skills to deliver such an ICT project.

- **Funding**
    - ‘*External financial support can also be a significant factor in gaining local interest, so long as there does not appear to be strings attached or ulterior motives*.’[28]
    - ‘*Outcome (performance) based funding offers potential to mobilise community resources to achieve specific goals and to accelerate change. It should be considered an additional option to traditional grant funding of community*

[23] Smart meter programme: preparing for evaluation. Learning from EDRP. AECOM
[24] Smart meter programme: preparing for evaluation. Learning from EDRP. AECOM
[25] Smart meter programme: preparing for evaluation. Learning from EDRP. AECOM
[26] DEHEMS
[27] DEHEMS
[28] Smart meter programme: preparing for evaluation. Learning from EDRP. AECOM

action….A prize is not a substitute for grant funding. None of the Finalists would have achieved what they did without access to other financial resources or in-kind support.'[29]

- '*The funding processes need to be capable of spotting individuals and organisations with the qualities needed to deliver tangible outcomes*.'[30]

3.12 Findings from the desk research on the future potential for communities in the smart meter roll-out

The desk research gave useful high-level insight into:

- The types of 'sustainable energy' projects that community groups (and energy professionals working with community groups) are involved in, including whether any have used energy monitors or smart meters
- The motivations of community groups and energy professionals in taking on sustainable energy projects
- The barriers commonly faced by community groups and professionals working with them to achieving successful outcomes
- Involvement of third parties such as local authorities
- The make-up of community groups who are able to successfully deliver projects
- The gaps in existing community skills

It also suggests some possible roles that communities could play in the smart meter roll out and how they could be involved in engaging consumers. However, as much of the research states it is unclear what the Government are expecting from communities, we should be cautious how much we expect from communities, particularly volunteers. The main reasons being that:

- They are volunteers, generally unpaid and have day-jobs around which they must fit their volunteer work
- They can get fatigue and lose commitment or have to prioritise other commitments
- To deliver tangible outcomes with the potential to last, community initiatives need to be goal oriented, have determined leadership, organisational capacity and the ability to adapt and evolve.

NESTA's evaluation of the Big Green Challenge best encapsulates the potential – and reasons to be cautious – of expecting communities to deliver energy saving messages[31]:

> "*Communities can spot and develop opportunities that private business or the public sector could or would not be able to take advantage of. They create a sense of ownership and responsibility that big and 'distant' organisations often can't, while a sense of collective endeavour makes individuals believe that change is both possible and worthwhile.*
>
> *[However] it is unclear: a) what is a realistic scale to expect from community led initiatives, especially with respect to behaviour change? Can they engage thousands of*

[29] The Big Green Challenge final evaluation report - executive summary. Brook Lyndhurst for Nesta
[30] The Big Green Challenge final evaluation report - executive summary. Brook Lyndhurst for Nesta
[31] The Big Green Challenge final evaluation report - executive summary. Brook Lyndhurst for Nesta

people in substantive change – or spread their success to other communities on a mass scale? b) Is there enough volunteer capacity, organisational capability and know-how in communities to support a mass expansion of community action? What support structures need to be in place to enable community organisations to unlock the full potential of their communities? And c) is there sufficient appetite in mainstream institutions and organisations to tackle the barriers that get in the way of effective community action on climate change?"

The Eigg 5kW challenge[32] (where all inhabitants of the island regulate their peak electricity use so as not to exceed the capacity of the island's - mostly renewable - electricity supply) shows that communities of people can come together to reduce and even cap their total energy use[33].

If community groups are to be involved in some way in the smart meter roll out, the following potential roles have been suggested by the desk research:

- **Offering 'expert' advice** e.g. home energy visits/behavioural advice, or supporting with activity such as 'pledges'.[34]
    - '*Although all factors were reported as being at least quite influential in encouraging energy reduction, learning from experts received the strongest support as a very influential factor*….'[35]
- **Communication and recommendation**
    - They could play a role in encouraging people to recommend to a friend or spreading messages about the benefits of smart meters.
    - The source of information on smart meters is important: Those who supported smart meters were more likely to have heard about them from an energy company or their workplace; as opposed to those from the media or an internet search engine.[36]
- **Encouraging use of in-home displays**:
    - Householders may need encouragement from friends/families/community groups to make use of the information from smart meters: '*22% of customers who said they had an in home display never looked at it, and a further 22% said they had not installed it.*'[37]
    - However: only 31% expressed an information need around IHD's and smart meters[38]

[32] http://islandsgoinggreen.org/about/eigg-electric/5kw-challenge/.
[33] It is worth bearing in mind that Eigg is a very specific example in that: a) being an island it is a very tightly defined geographical community, with a small population; b) the previous method of electricity generation (individual diesel generators) meant householders already had a high awareness of how much energy each appliance typically uses; and c) householders faced the penalty of disconnection (and having to pay to reconnect) if they exceeded their allocated peak power allowance, although to date this has had to be enforced on very few occasions.
[34] Climate Challenge Fund evaluation; however note there was no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of this 'pledge' system by the community group involved
[35] Evaluation of Blacon LCCC (final interim report), University of Chester
[36] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters
[37] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters
[38] DECC Quantitative research into public awareness, attitudes and experience of smart meters

- **Maintaining interest** and momentum amongst users:
  - ‘*Evidence from elsewhere suggests that people’s interest in energy monitors may not be sustained over a long period of time.*’[39]

- **Understanding of energy consumption in the community**, particularly of similar households in terms of size and age structure

  - There could be a chance for people to come together to talk about smart metering and how to interpret data and what savings to make.

- **Reaching the less affluent** or more excluded groups in communities. However this may be best tackled by groups other than green community groups; local authorities and charities focussed on social inclusion may be better placed to work with these groups.

This desk research has provided some insight into some of the current activities typically undertaken by community groups, their involvement with professionals, and the barriers they face in delivering projects, such as gaps in their skills and knowledge. However there is little literature currently focussed on smart meters (rather than energy monitors), and limited insight could be gained into the possible roles community groups could play in a non-regional, supplier led smart meter roll-out. The primary research presented in subsequent sections therefore aimed both to get a more in-depth understanding of the above points, and also to explore possible community group roles in a non-regional, supplier-led smart meter roll-out.

[39] Climate Challenge Fund evaluation

4. Main findings of primary research

The following section outlines the main findings relating to the results from the online survey and the in-depth telephone interviews, with communities and with energy professionals working with communities.

The sections have been devised in line with the key findings and DECC's priority research questions areas. The quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (in-depth interview) results have been reported in the same sections to deliver a full comprehensive interpretation of both sets of results around each topic area.

The key themes and main insights coming out of the data are summarised in section 5 of this report (Conclusions).

Limitations of the data have already been highlighted in section 2 (Research Approach) and should be read in conjunction with this section to ensure the data are interpreted appropriately.

4.1 Reporting the findings

This report presents the findings from a small research study which DECC commissioned the Energy Saving Trust to carry out to feed into their consumer engagement strategy.

The remit and scope of the research was devised by DECC to be very focussed. Therefore, findings are reported in line with the DECC research remit and key research questions devised by DECC and EST. Each section begins with a summary of the findings, followed by analysis of key research questions in text and chart format, where applicable.

The Energy Saving Trust drew its sample for the online survey part from the Green Communities Database, which it hosts. The Green Communities Database is thought to be the largest database of community groups and energy professionals working on community energy projects. This was thought to be the most cost effective route to sourcing communities working on sustainable energy and preferably smart meter projects. The online survey is a self-selecting sample and therefore, results may include bias. The respondents to the survey included a higher proportion of energy professionals than the database as a whole (41% compared to 33%). Completion of the survey was voluntary and the respondents self-defined what category they should be placed in.

It should be noted that the results are not representative for GB community groups due to the sample source, and the findings in this report provide only an insight and indicative results on opinions and views of the population as a whole.

It has not been possible to include all statistically significant differences from the quantitative work, therefore each question has been analysed and the most relevant and interesting significant differences included. Where figures do not sum to 100%, this is due to computer rounding or answers where the figure is less than 1 but greater than 0. Full data tables from the online survey are included in Appendix 3.

Community groups and energy professionals for the in-depth telephone interviews were identified from:

- contacts of the Energy Saving Trust (gained through the Green Communities programme, delivery of LEAF, delivery of RHPP2 and other community programmes)
- individuals / groups identified from the desk research
- respondents to the online survey who had given their permission to be contacted for further discussion of their answers.

A copy of the topic guide for the telephone interviews is included in Appendix 2. Interviews typically took between 30 and 45 minutes.

4.2 Respondents

The following sample was achieved for the survey and interviews (figure 3):

Figure 3: Sample sizes achieved by online survey and in-depth interviews

(The overall response rate for the survey was 7%, based on 178 online surveys completed from 2704 people contacted)

Research approach	Target	Actual achieved	% actual of target
Online survey	400	178*	47%
Communities	300	98	33%
Energy Professionals	100	77	77%
In-depth interviews	**55**	**54**	**98%**
Communities	30	32	107%
Energy Professionals	25	22	88%

**Three respondents did not state whether they were paid professionals or members of a community group.*

13 of the community groups and 1 of the energy professionals interviewed were also respondents to the online survey.

The sample achieved by the online survey is sufficient for the research purposes, as the numbers of responses were seen as sufficiently large to undertake sub-group analysis of responses from both community groups and energy professionals working with communities. Sub-group analysis is presented where available and where valuable to inform the findings.

The target sample for the in-depth interviews was met (and exceeded) for the communities, but was not met for the energy professionals. This was largely due to a lack of response from professionals to the invitation to take part in a telephone interview. However, overall 96% of the target for in-depth interviews was met.

Energy professionals:

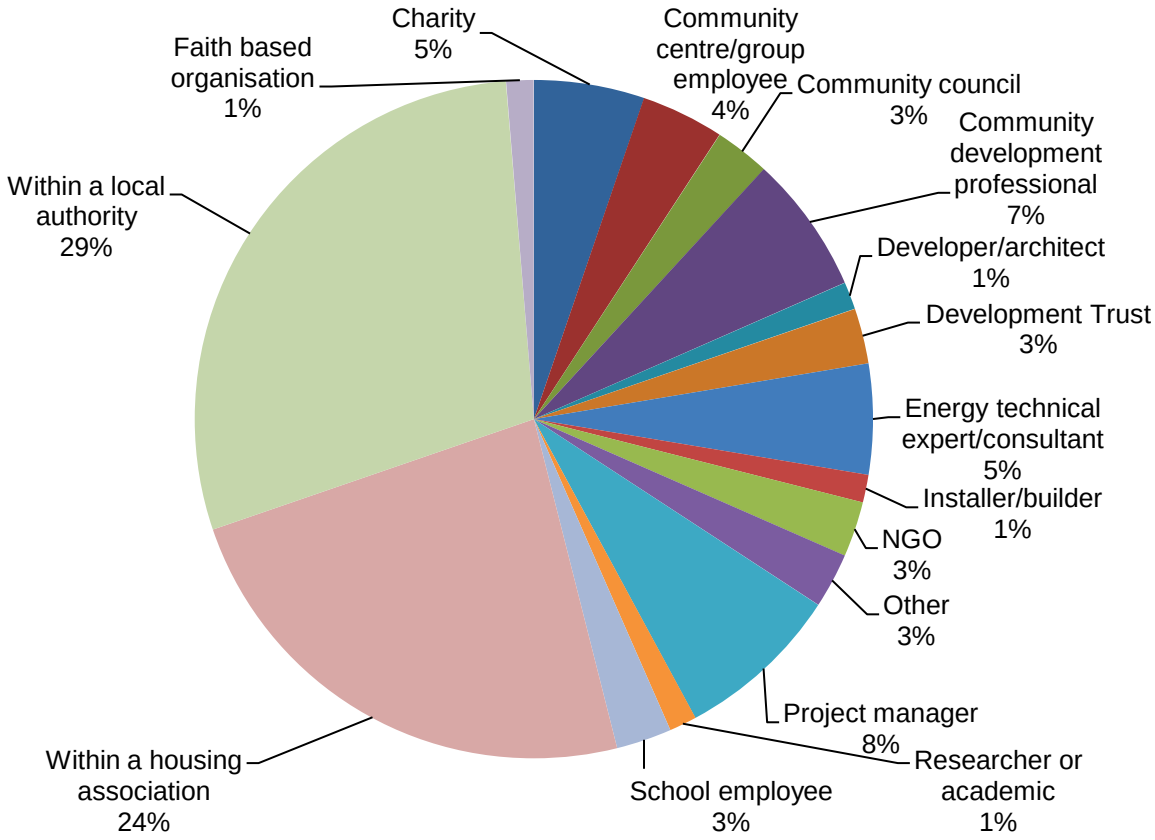
The energy professionals contacted via the online survey and in-depth interviews were people who have engaged with communities on the subjects of sustainability/climate change/energy use, or who work on community outreach as part of their professional role, as well as other professionals who are expected to be involved with the smart meter roll-out.

They included people working as:

- Energy / sustainability consultants, working with community groups;
- Consultants working on community capacity-building or community outreach;
- Local authority employees engaging with community groups;
- NGO's or other bodies administering funds to communities on behalf of DECC;
- Organisations evaluating the work of community groups;
- Academics researching community cohesion and/or behaviour change (supported or not by energy monitors/smart meters) in relation to reducing domestic energy consumption;
- Energy suppliers.

The majority of the online survey respondents were paid professionals who work with community groups (44%). 29% worked within a local authority and 24% within housing associations (figure 4). The remainder identified themselves as working within organisations such as charities, NGO's or development trusts, or working as community development professionals or energy experts.

Figure 4: Types of roles and organisations stated by the energy professionals responding to the online survey



Base: 77 individuals working professionally with communities on energy projects (including employees of local authorities, NGOs, consultancies, energy companies and energy system installation companies) contacted through community energy networks.

Of the 22 professionals interviewed in-depth:

- 4 were energy/sustainability/community consultants
- 6 worked for an NGO or not-for-profit organisation
- 7 worked for a local authority
- 2 were researchers at a University
- 2 worked for an energy supplier
- 1 worked for a housing association

Community group members:

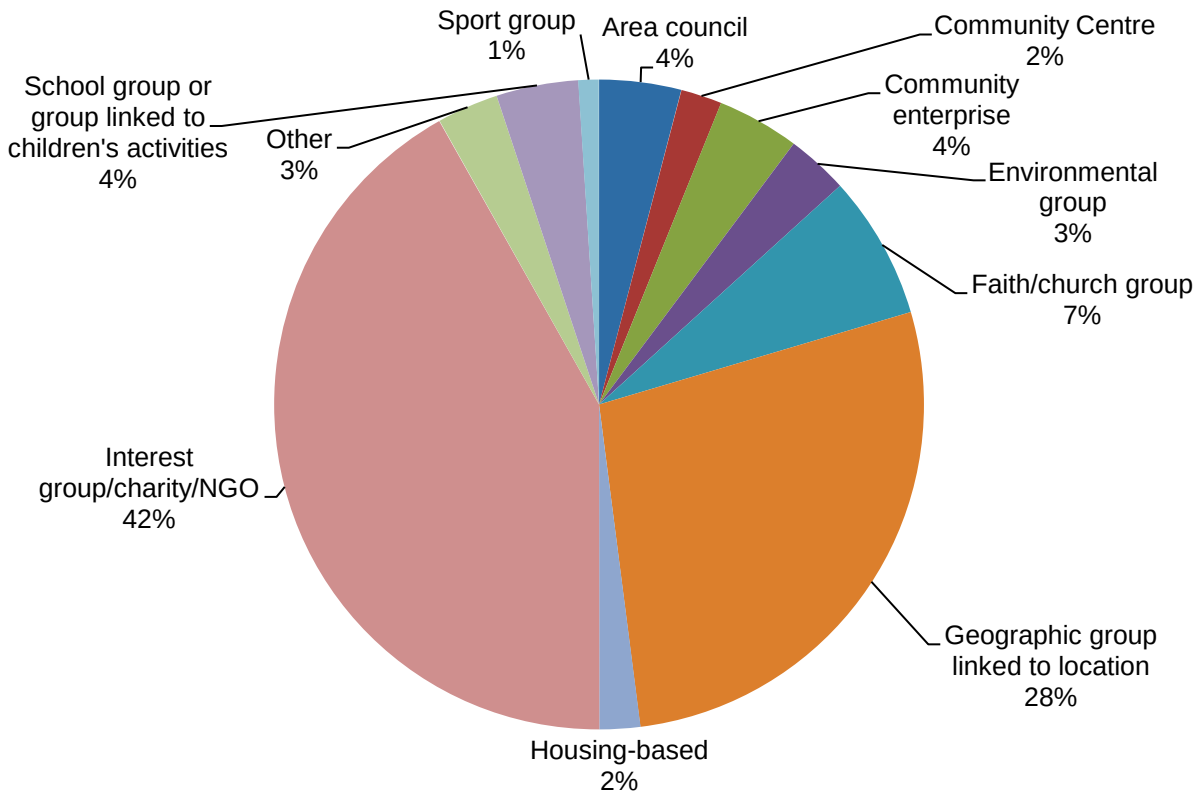
Out of all respondents to the online survey, 32% were voluntary members of a community group, and 24% were voluntary community group members with professional experience in the energy or community sector.

Voluntary members of community groups identified themselves as belonging to a variety of different community group types (figure 5), and from a broad range in terms of the size of community groups, from groups involving less than 10 members (22%) to over 250 (16%) (figure

6). It is important to note the difference between membership and 'catchment'. A common pattern amongst community groups is to have a small core membership of individuals who are active within the group, and a larger overall membership (for example, defined by the numbers of people on the group's emailing list or who have expressed interest in helping at or attending events). There is then a much larger catchment (e.g. a whole village, town or ward) with which the group engages. The size of community groups given in this report generally refers to the overall membership (rather than either the core active members, or the catchment area); however it is possible that respondents to the online survey may have interpreted this question differently.

Figure 5: The types of community groups to which volunteers belong

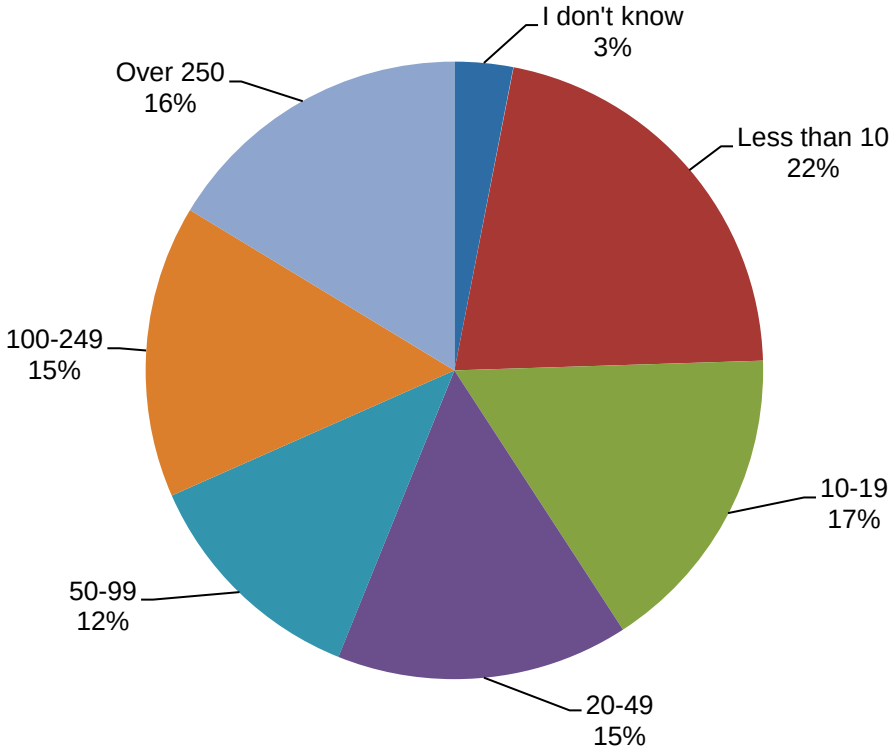
What type of community group do you belong to?



Base: 98 volunteers for community energy projects contacted through community energy networks

Figure 6: Number of members in the volunteers' community groups

How many members are there in your community group?



Base: 98 volunteers for community energy projects contacted through community energy networks

Of the communities interviewed in-depth, most had a small number of core, passionate individuals who founded or ran the group and had initiated or helped to run specific projects. These individuals often had energy or sustainability experience from their professional day job. Therefore, these individuals were very knowledgeable about the subject and highly skilled in areas such as project management. This was mentioned by many projects.

Community group projects:

Voluntary members, and energy professionals, were asked about the number and types of projects that their community groups (or the community groups they work with) are involved in.

80% of the community groups responding to the online survey were involved in projects relating to environmental issues (141 out of 178 respondents). Of these, the majority had worked on projects relating to energy efficiency (73%). Other environmental issues that groups worked on included generating renewable electricity/heat, sustainable transport and 'General Environment' (figure 7).

46 groups (26% of all responses or 33% of groups working on environmental issues) had worked on projects involving smart meters (although it is most likely that these projects actually involved energy monitors, rather than smart meters.) Groups which had worked on projects involving smart meters were more likely to have worked on projects relating to energy efficiency.

Figure 7, Question 10 Which (environment related) areas have your projects focused on? (Please select all that apply)	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
Energy efficiency	91%	73%
General Environment	67%	59%
Generating renewable electricity	59%	50%
Generating renewable heat	41%	33%
Sustainable Transport	35%	30%
Waste	30%	35%
Water	28%	20%
Other, please specify	24%	24%
I don't know	0%	0%
Number of respondents	**46**	**141**

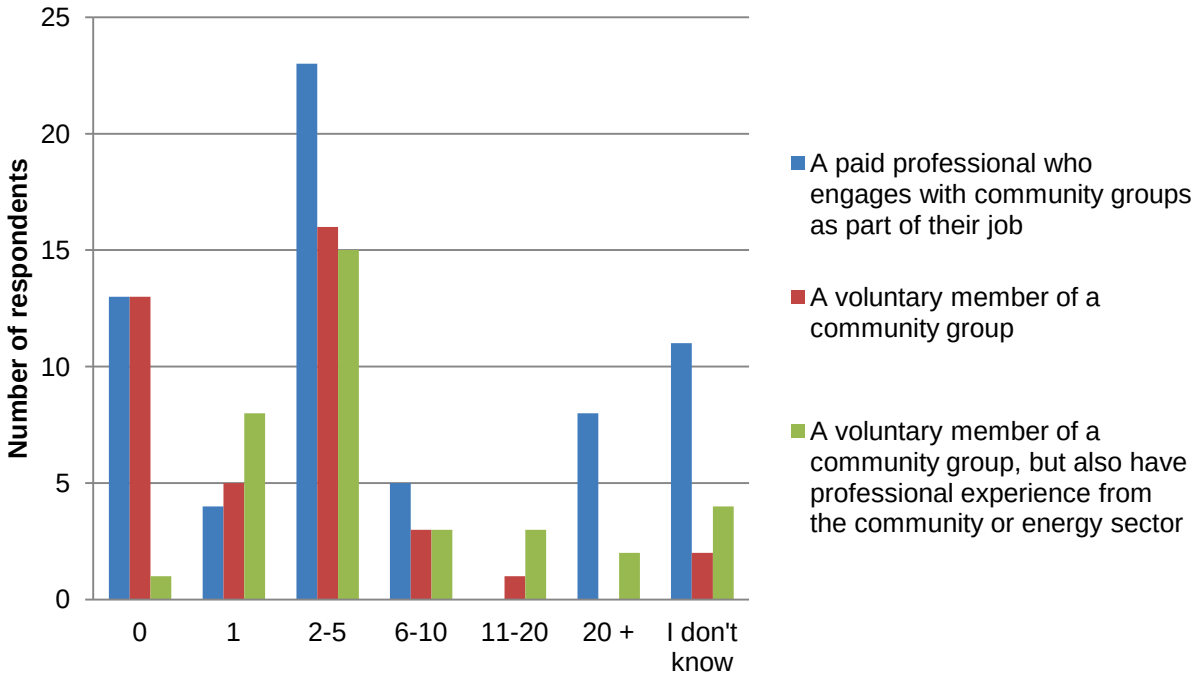
The majority of projects that community groups in the online survey were working on were based in a specific local area (90%) as opposed to working regionally (only 7%) or nationally (3%).

In some projects there was also an element of focus on fuel poverty or affordable warmth, but these tended to be in projects led by the local authorities, or where funding streams had specified a need to focus on fuel poverty or on engaging with people in deprived areas.

The majority of community groups involved in projects relating to environmental issues had delivered between two and five energy related projects (figure 8).

Figure 8: The number of energy-related projects community groups had been involved in, by online survey respondent

How many sustainable energy related projects has your community groups(s) delivered?



Base: 141 participants in community energy projects contacted through community energy networks

4.3 Drivers to get involved with energy-related projects

The majority of respondents in the online survey felt the main reason communities get involved in sustainable energy related projects is in order to reduce energy costs (87%) followed closely by concerns about climate change (79%).

Of those who were not involved in energy efficiency or sustainable energy projects, nearly half (49%) envisaged their groups getting involved in energy efficiency projects in the future. There is a strong appetite for energy-related projects with 78% of all respondents stating there would be interest from their community group around getting involved in energy efficiency and sustainable energy projects.

The communities spoken to through the qualitative in-depth research interviews were most commonly motivated by environmental reasons and (to a lesser extent) financial savings for their community. Those interviewed frequently expressed their primary motivation for involvement as wanting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and/or prevent harmful climate change, or to live a more sustainable life.

However many also pointed out that other members of the group were more motivated by wanting to ‘do something good’ and to be more involved in the local community. Several interviewees felt that talking about climate change hindered engagement with a wider audience, so although personally motivated by the issue they found it easier to engage people in

messages of working for the good of the local area, such as emphasising job creation or community resilience.

Some community group members interviewed in-depth reported that some of the people they were trying to reach in their community were unlike them, and that they struggled reaching the other parts of the community which were less knowledgeable and had a lower awareness of the issues, or were generally less involved in the community. This is an important reflection for the smart meter roll-out: it is a GB-wide roll-out so all sectors of society need to be engaged effectively. Inevitably the community groups that get involved early on in the initial stages will be of a similar profile to those mentioned above and may struggle accessing other parts of the community who are currently less well engaged.

4.4 Communities and 'smart meter' projects

46 respondents to the online survey (26% of all responses or 33% of groups working on environmental issues) had worked on projects involving smart meters (although it is more likely that these projects involved energy monitors than actual smart meters). 84% of projects involving 'smart meters' were rated as being successful.

Generally, respondents who had been working on energy monitoring projects felt that people in their community would react positively to having a smart meter (59% positively or very positively). Less positively, 33% felt they would be generally indifferent.

Those interviewed in-depth mirrored the information from the online survey and desk research that usually smart meters or energy monitors have been one element of a sustainable energy project with a larger focus (usually behaviour change), rather than the sole focus. In the in-depth interviews, most of the community groups interviewed had carried out projects promoting reduced energy use in the home through behaviour change.

Projects have incorporated energy monitors in two main ways:

- Encouraging behaviour change in households or communities
- Monitoring energy consumption in households or communities

The majority of projects have focused on using smart meters or energy monitors to drive behaviour change by encouraging householders to visualise and realise how much electricity they are using at home. Some provided an in-home or face-to-face assessment/discussion of energy use alongside the loan of the energy monitor, from trained volunteers within the community or occasionally a paid professional. This was felt to be very successful or popular, although no groups had done any evaluation of the resulting savings or changes to people's behaviour compared to a control group receiving only monitors.

Some communities chose to loan out energy monitors to the community via a 'hub' such as the local library, post office or council. Others handed them out at community group meetings, and promoted them during events such as local fairs.

In most cases the interviewees reported a 'good' level of interest/take-up in the energy monitors, although this was usually accompanied by an acknowledgement that people quickly stop looking at them once the initial interest wears off. Some had tried to sustain this interest with follow-up advice or visits, or competitions around who could save the most energy, but these seemed to have had limited success, for example, one group had established a web portal where people

could compare their energy use to others in their local area, but only 15 homes out of the 200 receiving a monitor submitted the data from their monitors.

Real 'smart meter' elements have been incorporated only into a very small number of projects so far, and are not particularly high on the agenda of communities yet, given the national roll-out has yet to start (although some suppliers are already installing smart meters).

Projects focusing on energy efficiency and renewable heat are still of more interest to those communities involved in energy efficiency projects. Several of the community groups interviewed noted that in recent years their focus has moved away from promoting energy efficiency to focus more on gardening/local food projects, and facilitating access to nature; while others had moved their focus to renewable energy, often as a means of income generation.

Very few projects in the desk research and online-survey – and only one interviewed in-depth - appear to have done any work with smart meters, as opposed to energy monitors. This is most likely to be a result of smart meter technology not yet being readily available and therefore communities have yet to develop projects that could focus on this as the main aim. However some of those interviewed thought that this would change over the coming years now that the smart meter roll-out is approaching, and as energy suppliers, Government and local authorities begin to promote them more heavily, raising the awareness of communities and householders. Some interviewees whose groups had organised 'meet the installer' renewable technology events expressed an opinion that the high general awareness of FiTs among the public helped these events to be successful; so community-led events relating to smart meters may be more successful if started once there is good general awareness of the roll-out.

One community group interviewed in-depth had already started installing smart meters in their small community (approximately 12 households). They have Ofgem permission to obtain anonymised electricity use data at substation level. The data would be imported onto a web portal set up by the distributor. However, it was more difficult than anticipated obtaining the data from the energy distributor. Some households had been waiting a year for data. Therefore, they are now attempting to set up the web portal themselves.

Most community members interviewed in-depth said they knew very little about smart meters themselves. Many had questions relating to practical or functional issues such as reliability of data transmission (both from the smart meter to the display[40], and from the meter to the energy supplier), data ownership, technological compatibility, standards for display functionality etc. Most interviewees wanted to know more about smart meters. Some clearly stated they would need to know more about them before trying to educate or engage other people in their group or community on the issue. Some also expressed a desire to be 'ready armed' with the answers to questions they thought other people would have around issues such as data protection or data security.

4.5 Energy professionals and sustainable energy projects

Energy professionals were on the whole positive about working with communities. There were general concerns over the time and resource it takes to involve communities. However, they

[40] Some of this concern appeared to be based on bad experiences with the functionality of in-home wireless internet, especially in older houses with thick walls.

saw communities as a key part of the relationship with the consumer to build trust and to engage, target and market in their 'known area'.

Energy professionals were more likely to cite benefits to the project itself rather than benefits to their organisation of working with community groups. The most commonly cited drivers included:

- To raise community spirits
- Increase commitment in the community
- To reach new groups in the community
- To make their projects more sustainable in the longer term

For many energy professionals, particularly those in local authorities and voluntary agencies, engagement with communities was a statutory requirement of their role. Some noted that working with communities had been beneficial to the council, as community groups were often willing to raise awareness of other council initiatives among their networks and that the more the local community knew about what the council was doing and could do on certain issues, the more positively the council was viewed by local residents.

Several energy professionals (and one or two community volunteers) who had worked with community groups and smart meters or energy monitors expressed concerns around:

- Functionality of the technology, in particular the 'user-friendliness' of displays and the information they can display
- The levels of energy savings that can be made by a householder with a smart meter

Some professionals also highlighted that community groups may not be able to reach all householders. Social housing providers (local authorities or housing associations) might be a better route to deliver information on smart meters to their tenants, for example. Some also felt that councils or energy suppliers would be a more natural first choice for householders wanting to know more about smart meters.

Effective community groups and projects:

Most respondents reported that communities that had a 'natural' reason to form were more effective at delivering successful projects, than those 'forced' together for a project. This is particularly important for 'geographic' communities when it comes to getting householders from streets or areas together. Several community groups interviewed were formed around running and repairing village halls or churches. Such venues are a 'hub' for communities (especially rural ones), are often visited by a wide cross-section of the local community (as they are venues for different groups and clubs), and can act as a platform to show-case energy efficiency measures and renewables. However such groups also declared themselves less knowledgeable about energy saving, preferring to act as sign-posters to more knowledgeable sources.

Communities which already had a specific focus or reason to meet (e.g. PV panels on the post office roof or a football club) were reported to be more likely to deliver longer term sustainable community projects. It was also noted by some that communities which were already in existence had previously built up trust within their community which would be advantageous. However in some cases this has been damaged by previous withdrawal of funding or support from other organisations.

Communities which had less ambitious, more focussed aims, were often reported to be more successful than those with more ambitious multiple aims. The former was seen as more successful as often the community would be very clear about what they were trying to deliver and would be able to deliver the project in a reasonable timeframe. This in turn led to positive feedback to the communities as they could see their own success, which in turn spurs them on to take further action. Those with larger, more complex aims often got stuck and lost momentum. This was apparent when interviewing energy professionals involved in the British Gas Green Street project, Energy Saving Trust's Green Communities Local Outreach support, and River Cottage's Energy Share.

4.6 Challenges and solutions around community action

To better understand why the communities and energy professionals are not always successful in implementing sustainable energy projects, all respondents were asked about the barriers and challenges they faced.

The lack of funds for community projects was cited by the majority of communities, but there was also the realisation that funds available are limited. Therefore, most respondents were happy to put the issue of 'lack of funds' to one side and discuss other barriers they faced.

The funding barrier aside, the main barriers cited by respondents included:

- **Lack of time**. This was cited by all. This was referred to in two ways:
    - Firstly, a lack of time by the community members, in terms of having sufficient time to get their projects delivered. Generally community group members are volunteers, and juggling a day job as well, or are sometimes funded to work for the community group for only one or two days a week.

    - Secondly, it related to the lack of time typically provided by grant schemes. Many communities referred to RHPP and LEAF, where timelines prescribed have been too short for many to provide what they see as a valuable and high quality project.

- **Lack of resource**, generally related to 'man power'. One community group member raised the issue that volunteers are already very busy and "*it is the same people in all these groups*". The issue of 'volunteer fatigue' has already been noted previously in the report.

- **Lack of community interest**. This was generally mentioned in conjunction with community or member fatigue, where community members grew tired or lost interest in the project.

- **Lack of understanding of new technology** and related barriers. Communities are currently not fully aware of the benefits to them of smart meters at the household / family level. Many interviewees commented that they currently do not know enough about smart meters or the roll-out to be able to communicate this effectively to others. Many demonstrated a great deal of interest in wanting to understand more about the hardware (the smart meters themselves) and practical issues around the roll-out and on-going maintenance (what happens to the smart meter if there is a power cut; will it still be able to transmit information to my energy company? How will the energy suppliers ensure all smart meters can 'talk' to different energy suppliers if I want to switch supplier? Who will 'own' the data? Who will meet the cost of the roll-out?).

- **Difficulty in communicating consistent messages** across the community. Due to the lack of understanding outlined above, groups find it difficult to communicate consistent messages about smart meters, energy monitoring and energy issues in general. This is compounded by apparently contradictory or inconsistent information through the media.

The following section outlines challenges which respondents had either encountered during smart metering projects or could foresee emerging in the future roll-out. Quotes from the interviews carried out for this research are provided to illustrate themes that were identified across the responses.

Funding:

One of the main challenges reported by groups involved in projects with smart meters was the availability of adequate funding and also meeting the requirements of the schemes funders. Although, as noted above, groups generally accepted that available funds were limited, some still insisted that even if larger funding schemes were not available, seed funding schemes for pilots to learn lessons would still be very valuable. In addition, difficulties obtaining funding for staff time and for on-going costs (overheads) were raised by some groups as posing a barrier to sustaining action and continuing to maintain their influence in their area once the initial 'burst' of enthusiasm for one project wears off.

The following are quotes gathered from community groups and energy professionals from the online survey:

> *Funding cuts to the voluntary sector have curtailed work in encouraging more environment groups to set up. (Paid professional)*

> *Getting enough funding together to provide advice work for all of the homes who are interested [is a barrier]. People are not keen to do community group work when talking about their energy bills/ behaviour around the home (when talking in specifics). People are very keen to do these things when in their own home one- on- one, and demand is very high for this. We have been applying for additional funding and have had some support from local volunteers. (Paid professional)*

Community inertia / apathy:

A significant proportion of respondents reported general inertia and apathy from their communities in relation to energy issues in general (although the desk research reported that people contacted by the groups within their projects were generally keen to try energy monitors themselves). Some felt that this could be overcome once a wider proportion of the community got involved.

[There is] apathy to energy use as people just accept living in fuel poverty and being in debt with energy providers. (Voluntary member of community group with professional experience)

Being able to engage with the right section of the community first of all was seen as helpful to overcoming the initial apathy:

Identify community leaders, provide interesting and motivating introductions, be well prepared to counter negativity. (Paid professional)

Direct householder engagement was also highlighted as an effective means of countering apathy (as supported by the desk research):

We employed two techniques. Face to face sessions in people's homes and engagement with individuals over the telephone. Face to face engagement proved more effective in engaging residents and encouraging them to employ energy saving measures*. (Paid professional)*

Showing householders real life examples of energy monitors was also mentioned as an effective way to engage potentially uninterested householders:

Signposting to help, have an example running of an energy monitor before giving them away and possible help with setting up. (Voluntary member of community group with professional experience)

One interviewee from the in-depth interviews noted that smart meters would be an 'easy sell' as they are providing free equipment. Energy suppliers will not be adding something that is going to make life more difficult, but rather providing something which will – hopefully - make life easier. (Energy professional, local authority). However another interviewee from a community group noted that people will need help identifying changes to their daily practises which can save energy, but which can also be realistically implemented in their lifestyles: the 'comfort, cleanliness and convenience' idea. For example, people do not decide to 'use energy' to watch TV, but rather use the TV to entertain the children while mum makes dinner[41].

Technical understanding:

Understanding how the technologies that were installed worked was a common problem for many of the projects. This was also coupled with the need to address misunderstanding of energy efficient behaviour. The following were issues identified from the online survey:

[41] Such ideas about 'practises' relating to energy use are covered in the book 'Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience' by Elizabeth Shove

Lack of understanding, mixed in with dealing with opinions formed after previous bad advice such as: "it's cheaper to leave it on then switch it off" when talking about appliances and immersion heaters. (Paid professional)

Overestimated reliability of Smart Monitoring technology / technical issues fitting the monitors. (Paid professional)

The community groups felt that they themselves needed to be trained (or at least well-informed) as to how the technology works in order for them to be able to engage with householders' technical issues or answer questions.

One telephone interviewee from a community group noted that although the local library supplied energy monitors, there were no instructions provided on fitting the monitor or changing the settings on the display. Another local environmental group had prepared a leaflet of advice but the libraries did not always include this with the monitors they loaned out: "*It's not joined up properly*". Other projects where such information, and tips on how to reduce energy use, was either provided with the energy monitors or supplied during an in-home visit, reported more positive results.

Trusting the advice:

Many respondents had difficulty in convincing their communities that the potential savings that were claimed through certain carbon-saving measures (such as cavity wall insulation, microgeneration measures or low energy lights and appliances) were reliable. Some felt that people were wary of advice coming from government:

General disbelief that savings could easily be made. Distrust of energy companies and statements from government is widespread. (Voluntary member of community group)

People seem wary. Maybe there's too much information out there. (Voluntary member of community group)

Community groups are a good way to communicate this [the smart meter roll-out] because people don't trust the energy companies, as they just see their bills going up all the time. (Voluntary member of community group)

When asked about overcoming these barriers respondents cited the need for impartial representatives giving the advice:

Trust appears to be built on personal leadership and being well known to your community otherwise you can easily be seen to be another dubious sales person. (Voluntary member of community group)

Costs:

Energy professionals reported that although they did find it beneficial to involve communities in their projects, it could add to their costs. This is mainly related to the extra time to communicate with communities. It also related to the time spent by energy professionals 'chasing' communities to get the work delivered.

Some of the respondents to the online survey, and several of those interviewed, were unsure about how the smart meter roll out is being paid for. The costs plus the benefits of the roll-out will need to be clearly explained to the community:

I think the rationale behind smart meter roll out needs to be better articulated as I think there might be a fear from some within the community that this is a technical exercise designed by energy companies to save them money and sell more products. (Paid professional)

Privacy issues:

Data security and data protection has often been cited in the media as a key barrier to the smart meter roll-out for consumers. This barrier was not raised as often as expected by respondents to either the online survey or in-depth interviews, although some interviewees did raise it. It was usually raised as an issue which needs to be managed appropriately – and effectively communicated on - in order to gain householders' trust. However, some respondents also reported they felt that the media had portrayed it as more of an issue than householders see it being.

Some respondents felt that if managed appropriately, data at the right aggregated level could continue to stimulate behaviour change. The ability for a community to understand the energy they are consuming before and after a project and even compare themselves (e.g. street to street) was mentioned by a number of energy professionals. That said all respondents did realise the sensitivity of the issue and that it needed to be treated with caution.

Addressing and allaying people's fears around privacy and data; who will be able to view their energy data, how can a cast iron guarantee be given to provide assurance that this data will not be used by criminals looking to identify unoccupied homes. (Paid professional)

Understanding the need for them and they may think that 'the government are watching them'. Clear communication is the key but not from the government from the community. (Paid professional)

4.7 How could communities help engage people with smart metering?

All respondents interviewed during the in-depth qualitative interviews, both communities and energy professionals, felt positively about any moves to involve communities in the engagement of consumers in the smart meter roll-out. A key point raised by many was that communities could provide the 'trust' severely lacked in the current relationship between consumer and energy supplier.

The following quotes were provided by energy professionals in the online survey:

Residents are so wary of allowing strangers into their homes and especially from companies that have acquired such a bad reputation for various reasons. (Paid professional)

People in communities don't like 'experts' cos they think they are going to try and sell them something. They trust local people and so this is the best way to open minds. (Paid professional)

*You have to be very careful to win people's engagement first, otherwise they feel something is being imposed on them. Their experience of having supposedly 'good things' impose on them is too often that it's never for *their* good, it's for someone else's financial benefit. And energy saving is so often couched in negative terms, it's no wonder people who're already not that interested switch off when someone else comes along and bleats the same-old message at them! (Paid professional)*

In addition, community groups say they are aware of the issues in their local area. For example, most were able to talk about the relevant issues to taking action on energy issues in their area; either a prevalence of hard to treat homes, or fuel poverty.

There were positive responses from all about the potential for communities to play a role in the smart meter roll-out. The most commonly cited roles included:

- **Awareness raising** within their own community
- **Keeping up the momentum** and motivation
- **Providing practical help and support** to householders – e.g. basic advice on reading the monitor and tips on how to save energy. It was recommended that those trained or who already lived with a smart meter would be most effective at this, and several community groups interviewed expressed the need/desire for more training themselves before they could deliver this.
- **Handholding** householders through the process of getting and living with a smart meter

However some respondents were wary of over-reliance on green champions and advised that a range of engagement channels should be used:

Local help from a trustworthy neighbour is very influential. However, over reliance upon green champions or 'the usual suspects' can backfire. It is best to use a range of channels or conduits. E.g. Residents Associations, Schools, Local Authorities etc. (Paid professional)

I think a lot of community groups are overstretched already, and will only want to do this type of thing if they are really interested in it themselves / could potentially generate an income for the group by offering this. (Paid professional)

A few respondents raised the issue of formalising the relationship and role of communities. This could be done by having a community stream to the smart meter roll out where communities could bid to participate and then lead local roll-outs. They could manage the relationship with suppliers so that the roll-out was delivered in a community focused, coordinated approach across the region. However such approaches would need to allow community groups to maintain their trust as impartial advisors. Some community groups suggested this could be achieved through ensuring transparency.

There was a noticeable division within the community groups interviewed in-depth as to their preferred role in engaging with local people on the smart meter roll-out. Those formed due to a common interest in sustainability or energy efficiency (e.g. Transition Town organisations) were keen to be involved in both raising awareness about smart meters, and also offering advice about using the meters and how to act on the information they provide. Those groups formed around a particular local building such as a church or community/village hall saw their role as general/'light' awareness raising about the issue, and then signposting to other organisations; as one such interviewee said: "*We're not the experts*".

4.8 Means and channels for engagement

Professionals engaging with community groups:

The majority of energy professionals responding to the online survey noted their existing community engagement work relied on both communities seeking the respondents' support, and also the respondent offering their support to the community (figure 9). Respondents mostly said that the community is fully involved in the project and shares the responsibilities (figure 10).

Figure 9, Question 36 (energy professionals) In your work, do you usually try to engage people in the community in projects or do they invite you to assist them?	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
Both	67%	65%
You invite the community	29%	31%
The community invite you	4%	4%
Number of respondents	**24**	**77**

Figure 10, Question 37 (energy professionals) How do you generally involve people in the community in projects?	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
The community is fully involved throughout and shares responsibilities	50%	46%
I keep the community informed	25%	32%
I seek feedback actively from the community	25%	22%
No involvement at all	0%	0%

Figure 10, Question 37 (energy professionals) How do you generally involve people in the community in projects?	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
Number of respondents	**24**	**76**

The majority of professional respondents to the online survey felt they could play an important part in raising awareness and offering education around smart meters, as well as offering practical support and advice. Around a third suggested they could help in targeting households for meter upgrades (figure 11).

Figure 11, Question 35 How do you think professionals like you could play a part in helping people in the community engage with smart meters? (Please select all that may apply)	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
Awareness raising & education	79%	75%
Local simple support & advice	67%	68%
Practical help with using and understanding the devices	58%	62%
Marketing & communication	46%	46%
Support with keeping up momentum	46%	43%
Being a trusted/expert advisor	42%	46%
Project management	38%	38%
Targeting householders for upgrades of meters	33%	36%
Other, please specify	29%	1%
Technical support and advice	25%	36%

Figure 11, Question 35 How do you think professionals like you could play a part in helping people in the community engage with smart meters? (Please select all that may apply)	Projects involving smart meters	All projects
Nothing	0%	18%
I don't know	0%	0%
Number of respondents	**24**	**77**

Communities rely on NGO's/not-for-profit organisations such as the Centre for Sustainable Energy, Carbon Leapfrog and the Energy Saving Trust for information. Some also get information directly from the DECC website and through DECC's email bulletins. Several of those interviewed (and almost half of respondents to the online survey) bring knowledge and experience from their professional lives, as they work on sustainability/energy/community engagement. Many of those stay in touch with information or developments via professional networks and email bulletins or sector-relevant news alerts.

Interviewees often mentioned they were part of community networks such as the Low Carbon Communities Network and the Transition Network. Email bulletins from such organisations were mentioned as an important source of information, both on Government programmes (funding, policy changes, new programmes) and what other environmental or community groups are doing. In addition, most mentioned that they are directly in contact (although perhaps not frequently) with other community groups, and some interviewees gave examples of projects they were running or had run which were inspired by or copied from the work of other groups.

Some groups feel they need help knowing about things at national and also a local level which are of relevance to them. Some use the council as the source of information on a local level.

Community groups engaging with householders:

Most channels asked about in the online survey were seen as good ways of communicating with people about smart meters, with over 50% of respondents indicating these were a good way to communicate with people (the one exception being providing information through workplaces).

Respondents in the in-depth interviews were asked which form of communication channels they would see as most effective to disseminate information around smart meters to communities and householders. No one communication channel was cited. It was seen by all that an effective consumer engagement strategy needs to employ many channels of communication to reach as many sectors of society as possible. Communities currently communicating with their members and the wider community reported their most commonly used channels such as:

- Emailing their member list;

- Using their website or blog – or an associated/shared network's website/blog;
- Using a 'community hub' – such as the local post office, church or village hall - to act as a drop-in centre for householders to pop in and gather advice. This could be in the form of leaflets or posters, or trained community volunteers to provide face to face advice;
- Having a stall at other local events;
- Arranging a slot to appear at other community meetings;
- Attending forums and meetings arranged by councils for voluntary groups;
- Putting information in local publications such as church or parish newsletters, or local newspapers;
- Using trusted 'formal' intermediaries such as formal community networks like the Community and Climate Action Alliance, or parish councils
- Word of mouth: asking people to spread the word about the project/community group to others through their personal networks was frequently mentioned as being the most effective channel.

Some mentioned the need for the communication channel to be impartial or non-political. For example the local school or post office could provide information, or a local impartial organisation such as a parish council.

The poor and the elderly were seen as being harder for groups to engage with, although few interviewees were able to suggest concrete reasons for this. Interviewees noted that such people are often in fuel poverty, but don't spend a lot on energy (or use a lot of energy) compared to other more affluent members of communities.

Several energy professionals and some community volunteers mentioned the importance of recognising in communications that the majority of householders are not concerned with 'energy', but rather comfort. Also, promoting the issues of local resilience or enhanced community cohesion are seen as successful ways of engaging with people for whom 'environmental' issues are not interesting. Where possible, tying messages or actions into local areas or local issues is also seen as valuable.

Two interviewees expressed a concern that it was also hard to engage on the subject of energy use or climate change with very affluent members of a community, who have no little concern over energy costs and are also likely to large users of energy. One suggested some people could possibly be engaged around the idea of 'taking control' or personal power.

4.9 Required support/skills and gaps

76% of all respondents to the online survey who had worked on projects involving smart meters thought that if community groups were to get involved in the smart meter roll-out, such groups would need support in providing basic energy efficiency advice in order to help householders engage with their meters. 69% said they would need support by way of pre-prepared information and toolkits.

Training in how to talk to others about smart meters - they would probably need to have one themselves already to have got used to how they work and develop tips for how to get the best out of them. (online survey)

The majority of respondents from projects involving smart meters (70%) also stated that in order to be more effective at engaging with the community they would require "*technical advice suitable for a consumer audience*" (figure 12).

Figure 12, Question 41 **In what areas do you feel you need more support in to be more effective at engaging people in the community? (Please select all that may apply)**	**Projects involving smart meters**	**All projects**
Technical advice suitable for consumer audience	70%	52%
Support with keeping up momentum and commitment	40%	40%
Marketing and communication	30%	32%
Financial expertise	20%	19%
Policy understanding	15%	21%
Other, please specify	15%	8%
Awareness raising and education	10%	32%
Targeting householders	5%	10%
Project management experience	5%	7%
I don't know	0%	12%
Number of respondents	**20**	**73**

There were differing opinions of what was required in terms of support for community projects through the in-depth qualitative interviews. The opinions were split in terms of:

- Those that felt communities needed further capacity and skills built. These included:

  - Help with awareness/marketing – further support about how to keep up the momentum and interest of communities.
  - Project management (including procurement/accountancy skills)
  - Training to be able to deliver practical, basic technical support to householders.

- Those that felt communities had all the skills, but just needed more time/financial support.

  - Those who had been involved in successful projects were of the opinion that communities often had the necessary skills, as many had transferable valuable skills from their day job (e.g. project management skills) and what they needed was more time/funding for full/part-time positions, as currently most community members are volunteers.

- Those who felt more materials and information on smart meters – and home energy use - were needed. Many felt comfortable engaging with their local communities, but felt they currently lacked credible information on smart meters and also energy use in the home. For example they would like:

  - Tools and templates to help them deliver – some mentioned the tools and templates which had previously been developed by projects such as Energy Saving Trust's Green Communities or NESTA's Big Green Challenge, or 'games' to help engage people in what can otherwise be a 'dry' subject
  - Workshops to help community groups share best practice and support each other.

Some interviewees expressed an interest in involving their groups or communities in pilot roll-out schemes during the interviews. This is usually because they recognise that smart meters (and in particular the accompanying in-home displays) would help householders to connect with messages the groups themselves were trying to promote, such as improved awareness of energy use, behaviour change to reduce energy use, or generating interest in renewable energy (either on individual households or establishing a community energy scheme). Such interviewees were keen to act as trailblazers, setting an example and using their experiences to educate and raise awareness of the technology among others in their community.

Community groups are keen to be exemplars to other members of their communities. Several raised the idea of their group members being good first recipients of smart meters, as they could then act as ambassadors for them for other members of the community.

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of demonstrations of energy saving technology. Some are using 'open homes' days to raise awareness of energy saving measures and proposed that homes with smart meters could be included in such events. Those who had run such events felt they were an excellent way of both raising awareness of energy saving technology, and making people more comfortable with the idea of having such technology in their own homes[42]. Using village or church halls, or other civic or community buildings, were also

[42] None of the groups had conducted any formal evaluation of the success of 'open homes' style events on raising awareness in their community or installing energy saving or renewable technologies. However all those who mentioned they had run such an event reported satisfactory levels of attendance and interest compared to what they expected. EST studied open homes activities and how they affect visitors' propensity to install measures. Based on events held in 2010 in four locations in England, 3 months after attending an open homes event 58% of those surveyed had taken action in at least one area of their home, and 30% had taken action on insulation or renewables.

mentioned as good places to demonstrate energy saving or renewable technologies to the wider community.

Working with others:

A town, district or county council was mentioned by between half and a quarter of interviewees as a partner in existing or past projects. Such relationships were usually talked of as being positive and of mutual benefit to both partners, helping both achieve their aims around community engagement/capacity building and raising awareness of environmental issues. Councils were mentioned as providing or having provided:

- Promoting the work of the community group and it events among other community groups and/or business forums;
- Support with 'benefits in kind', usually mutual awareness raising;
- Collateral or skills that community groups do not have access to e.g. GIS mapping;
- Support with administration;
- Support with legal work/paperwork;
- Public statements of support regarding the groups' aims or particular projects

Most interviewees were positive about the council's involvement on projects; however a couple noted that councils were less able to help now that less money was available.

Some groups raised the possibility of working with energy companies to identify households to get smart meters installed, to educate their communities about the smart meter roll out, or even to identify willing households (although some suggested this should be done in return for a small referral fee). Others were prepared to consider these ideas when they were suggested to them by the interviewer. However, they felt such relationships would need to be of 'benefit' to them. Such relationships or schemes would also need to be as transparent as possible, so that community groups can maintain their reputation for impartiality and remain trusted within the wider community.

Some had worked with other non-environmental/energy related community groups in their area to raise awareness of events and messaging, usually around raising awareness of one event or offer organised by the group, or signposting interested people to the group for more information. Few had tried to educate other groups directly on the issues they were working on but saw them as essential in raising awareness of their existence and aims.

A small number had worked with housing associations to educate tenants on energy saving behaviours. Those who had done so talked of a desire to reduce fuel poverty in their area, or to help all households in their area understand their energy use and/or environmental impact. However most acknowledged it had been harder to engage social housing tenants in messages about saving energy.

Community resources:

Some make use of support from organisations such as the Centre for Sustainable Energy and the 'pro bono' work provided through Carbon Leapfrog for support with legal matters or grant applications.

Some community groups appear to have become proficient in finding and applying for grant funding, either from national Government, local government or charities/NGO's. Others talked of

the struggle for financing even small jobs such as getting leaflets printed to advertise an event. Some mentioned they would like a source of information on what grants are open to them.

5. Conclusions

The views on how communities and energy professionals can play a part in engaging consumers with the smart meter roll-out have raised a number of interesting and valuable findings that will be important for DECC to consider in terms of the future consumer engagement strategy for the continued roll out of smart meters.

The key conclusions from these findings are presented below. It should be remembered that this work mostly contacted groups involved in or interested in environmental issues such as sustainability or climate change. More research would be required to properly understand the roles that other 'community' groups or structures might be able to play in the smart meter roll-out.

5.1 Communities as they are now

Communities with a simple purpose are often seen as more successful that those with much larger and more ambitious plans. Communities were often seen as 'biting off more than they could chew early on' and then struggling to prioritise actions and deliver them. Communities with smaller, clear aims often were able to deliver projects more quickly. Subsequently realising a success then spurred the communities on to deliver more actions.

Communities with members who had 'key skills' for sustainable energy project delivery – such as administration, procurement, project management, budgeting etc. – were seen as more effective. This was because members could transfer their skills from their day job –for example as a manager - into good use in the sustainable energy community project. Therefore, not all communities felt that they required 'skills' development or training. The mix of skills needed differs from one community to another depending on the knowledge, capacity and skill-set of its volunteers, but might include technical knowledge on sustainable energy, writing funding or finance proposals, business planning and financial management. Where enhancement of skills was mentioned, awareness raising, and marketing and communications, were the most commonly quoted areas where communities feel they need more skills.

A mix of channels needs to be employed (by community groups or other interested parties) to ensure effective engagement of all types of consumers. There was no one channel reported as preferred by communities or energy professionals, but rather a combination of different channels was reported as necessary for effective engagement.

Community groups believe they are usually trusted within their local communities. But this trust can be lost if projects fail to deliver results, or if community groups are let down by other project partners or technologies.

5.2 Community roles in engagement around the smart meter roll-out

All respondents interviewed during the in-depth qualitative interviews, both communities and energy professionals, felt positively about any moves to involve communities in the engagement of consumers in the smart meter roll.

Some community groups recognised that smart meters (and in particular the accompanying in-home displays) would help householders to connect with messages the

groups themselves were trying to promote, such as improved awareness of energy use, behaviour change to reduce energy use, or generating interest in renewable energy (either on individual households or establishing a community energy scheme). As such some interviewees expressed an interest in involving their groups or communities in pilot roll-out schemes.

Communities should not be expected to do too much as part of the smart meter roll out. In addition to being limited by the time and energy available from their largely voluntary members, most noted that they currently find it harder to engage people on energy use and behaviour change than on issues such as renewable energy, local food production or generally building better community ties.

Community groups recognise that smart meters could help community groups achieve the goals they themselves already have, around raising awareness of energy use and encouraging personal action around climate change. Especially as groups currently find it challenging to engage people on these topics (as per point above).

Green community groups would be good vehicles for engaging people on the smart meter roll-out, but should not be the only vehicles. Community groups do not have to be 'green' as long as they have a sufficient 'reason to group/bond' (e.g. location/faith/school), and they can be trained or learn about environmental/smart meter initiatives if that fits well with their wider role in the community e.g. awareness-raising on local issues. However such groups would probably be more comfortable 'signposting' to further (ideally impartial) sources of information. 'Green' community groups should not be expected to reach all members of society, as they typically attract people who are already engaged with environmental and/or energy efficiency issues (although they do make an effort to be accessible to all).

There were positive responses from all about the potential for communities to play a role in the smart meter roll-out. The most commonly cited roles included:

- Awareness raising within their own community
- Keeping up the momentum and motivation
- Providing practical help and support to householders, particularly on basic advice about how to use a smart meter/in-home display, and how to identify ways to save energy in the home. It was recommended that those trained on smart meters, or who already lived with a smart meter, would be most effective at this
- Handholding householders through the process of getting and living with a smart meter

The non-regional, supplier-led nature of the smart meter roll-out was felt by respondents to present some challenges for communities, but also some opportunities. The long timescale (2014-2019 for Great Britain) and the fact that different suppliers will be working with their own customers in an area, probably at different speeds to each other, means community groups will struggle to support all householders in their area throughout the roll-out period. However the long roll-out also allows time for establishing demonstration/pilot projects. The large number of suppliers means community groups may struggle to work with all the energy suppliers active in their area, and may have to focus on working with one or two. Alternatively groups could choose not to partner with particular suppliers, but to position themselves as impartial advisors to their community or working with a local authority instead of directly with energy suppliers.

Some felt that if managed correctly with appropriate restrictions and supervision then some access to data and sharing of data would be beneficial to communities. For example

the ability for communities to understand their own energy use and carbon footprint, and even compare themselves against their neighbours to encourage further behaviour change.

5.3 Supporting community needs around involvement in the smart meter roll-out

Community groups need/want more information before they can act to engage others with the smart meter roll-out. Although most had heard of smart meters, many were unclear about the details of the roll-out, the technology that will be used, or even what exactly a smart meter is (as opposed to an 'energy monitor'). Many felt they would benefit from support in 'translating' this into easily-understandable information for other members of the public. Once armed with such information and/or materials, most said they would be happy to take on the role of providing people with headline advice about smart meters, and also (some groups) more in-depth advice on using the information from the smart meter to reduce energy use, or at least signposting to other organisations who could offer this.

A commonly-expressed desire was for materials to help community groups communicate about the smart meter roll-out. For example:

- Tools and templates to help volunteers (some communities referenced the resources which the Energy Saving Trust Green Communities programme and NESTA had produced in the past)
- Basic energy efficiency/smart meter advice
- The chance to workshop with other community groups to develop materials themselves, and share learning.
- Information about smart meters which was available in 'householder friendly language' which they can then use

Communities feel they would be able to achieve more with access to more funding; particularly to funding for part-time staff to project manage, and co-ordinate work.

Some communities are taking steps to move away from grant funding toward being self-sustaining through revenue generating activities, but not all have managed this yet. Community ownership of FIT-eligible renewables is one model a few groups have successfully implemented, and more wish to replicate; but not all currently have access to skills or the initial financing required, and others may lack the confidence needed to develop such schemes.

5.4 Reaching community groups and householders

Many community groups are connected to others via community/sustainability networks. In particular they see the networks between different community groups as a good way to share ideas and information.

Community groups get information from a variety of sources, including the websites of – and email bulletins from – DECC, the Energy Saving Trust, the Centre for Sustainable Energy and community group networks (see above). Many have members who bring experience and knowledge from their professional lives and so get information on energy/sustainability issues that way.

A focus on organically-formed communities - where possible - may be preferable to seeking to establish new groups. Most respondents reported that communities that had a 'natural' reason to form were more effective at delivering successful projects, than those 'forced' together for a project. This is particularly important for 'geographic' communities when it comes to getting householders from streets or areas together. Communities are wary of strangers coming in from outside to promote a particular message as there is assumed to be an ulterior motive, often profit-making. Working with existing community energy networks (such as Transition or Low Carbon Communities) represents an opportunity to target organically formed groups with a specific interest in energy projects. These groups, other voluntary sector networks (such as Locality) and Parish/Community Councils could help to cascade information out to other existing community groups in order to reach beyond those already engaged with energy.

Examples of successful projects will be key to communicate to householders and get communities on board. This may mean further research to seek out and write up case studies, and distribute these among community groups via existing networks. As this research has shown the current smart meter projects are quite limited in number, pilot projects could to be encouraged, potentially by seed funding.

5.5 Communities working in partnership with others

Communities are keen to work in partnership with other organisations where doing so brings them benefits. For example working with local authorities can lend formal recognition and a sense of authority or 'official-ness'. Those questioned on it were prepared to consider working with energy companies as long as the relationship is 'transparent' in order to maintain their reputation of impartiality and trusted status among residents. It will need to be clear to community groups what they can gain from working with other partners (other than funding) in order for them to want to be involved.

Energy professionals were on the whole positive about working with communities. There were general concerns over the time and resource it takes to involve communities. However, they saw communities as a key part of the relationship with the consumer to build trust and engage, target and market in their 'known area'.

Some energy professionals raised the issue of formalising the relationship they had with communities, in order to make it work more effectively. Some suggested the idea of paying communities for certain roles or a community stream to the roll-out where communities bid in to participate and work with installers (e.g. commission for the number of householders that had been signed up). However such an approach would need to be balanced against preserving the credibility of community groups as 'impartial' and working for the good of the community.

Local authorities were seen as an important aid to success of community projects. They provide significant support-in-kind such as lending rooms for community meetings, signposting communities, providing guidance around planning etc., and can be a way for community groups to promote messages to other interested parties or voluntary groups. Working productively with community groups was also seen to bring benefits to the local authority itself.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations presented here include opinions and insight both from respondents and from the Energy Saving Trust.

The Energy Saving Trust notes that, since the field work for this research was completed, DECC has published the Government Response to the Consultation on Smart Metering Consumer Engagement. This notes the important role of community organisations in delivering effective consumer engagement and the role of the Central Delivery Body in working with third parties, such as community groups, to engage consumers.

The Energy Saving Trust also notes DECC's current work on the development of a community energy strategy.

Community groups can help in the smart meter roll out, and should be engaged with. Energy suppliers and Government can make use of community groups' passion and desire to 'do something' about climate change and the environment to engage with householders on the smart meter roll-out. Householders appreciate being able to talk about ways to save energy in the home - whether that is behavioural changes or technologies – face-to-face, with someone they already know from their community. Community groups could provide this link.

Existing community groups have experience engaging with people in their communities. They know the issues that are relevant to people and stakeholders in the local area, and have experience in what works well (or not) with engaging people in their area.

Key points where community activity might add value to the smart meter roll out are:

- **Awareness raising** within their own community, providing a local perspective alongside national promotion and media coverage.
- **Keeping up the momentum** and motivation for people to continue using their smart meters beyond the initial "honeymoon period"
- **Providing practical help and support** to householders – e.g. basic advice on reading the monitor and tips on how to save energy. It was recommended that those trained or who already lived with a smart meter would be most effective at this, and several community groups interviewed expressed the need/desire for more training themselves before they could deliver this.
- **Handholding** householders through the process of getting and living with a smart meter

Reaching communities

DECC should work with community energy networks (e.g. Transition Network, Low Carbon Communities Network and the umbrella Communities and Climate Action Alliance) to communicate out to potential "early adopters" of community activity on smart meters. Representatives of these networks have been consulted for this research and have shown

interest in further, deeper engagement with the smart meter roll out. Early re-engagement with these networks on next steps following this report would help to build trust and demonstrate willingness to collaborate. Generally these networks have limited resources so consideration should be given to resourcing any services requested from them.

The benefits to the roll out of smart meters would be:

- Direct access to on-the-ground experience from active communities
- Reach to the majority of community groups active on energy via newsletters, websites, social networking etc
- Building trust and engagement across the sector by involving trusted organisations and individuals in planning the role of communities
- Proven ability to quickly and cost effectively disseminate information to the target audience, as evidenced by the promotion of the “LEAF” fund.

In addition to community energy specific networks information could also be provided to local authorities and general community networks (e.g. Voluntary sector support bodies, Parish Council Networks, Co-operatives, schools). This would help to engage groups that are not currently working on energy and climate change issues. This communication could be especially effective if it promoted community engagement activity delivered in pilots by “early adopter” communities.

Community - Energy Supplier partnerships:

A follow up action to this study could be to begin work on facilitating agreement between community groups and energy suppliers on how they can work together and what each can expect from the other. Drawing on the findings of this research facilitated meetings between representatives of communities and community networks could work with Energy Supplier and DECC representatives to share their needs from the Smart Meter roll-out and explore models for partnership working. Key questions to answer for all parties would be: “What do we want to get out of it?” and “What do we want from others?” before identifying areas of agreement and models for joint working. This could then lead to joint signature of a protocol/code of conduct for partnership working on smart meter roll out, to help build trust and facilitate greater acceptance of partnership working amongst both communities and energy suppliers.

A similar approach has been used in the past in SW England to develop an agreed protocol between communities and the wind industry on community benefit from windfarms.
Some groups identified a need for input from an independent expert organisation that could provide technical input at public events or by briefing community volunteers and supporting groups with technical information and through answering questions. This role could be especially important in engaging non-expert community groups who do not have previous experience on energy projects but have a much greater reach than environment/energy specific groups. Peer to peer support from experienced community groups often works well alongside external experts.

Local authorities

Local authorities also have an important role in supporting and engaging with community groups around smart meters. This can include (but is not limited to):

- arranging information sharing for mutual benefit (the council raising awareness of community group events with relevant partners in return for the community group raising awareness of council programs amongst its membership)
- providing meeting rooms
- providing small packages of finance for small projects (such as poster and flyer production)
- statements of support for community activity or specific projects (such as a 'green charter').

Information provision

Public information

Communities could be involved in distribution of public information on smart meters. This material could include information on:

- how to use smart meters, including how to use them to drive down fuel bills
- their benefits and features
- their role in development of smart grids and future benefits to householders and others
- myth-busters (on issues such as data protection, what suppliers will use the data for etc).

Briefing to communities

Alongside this information a briefing for communities could be prepared addressing the question: "what can smart-meter roll out do for my community?" This has been a key question raised by many interviewees and addressing it directly could help to engage community groups and help them to understand how smart meters can support their work. This could be distributed cost-effectively through community networks and local authorities and could draw on the outputs from the previous recommendation around developing a protocol between communities and energy suppliers.

An effective way to embed this information might be to run briefing sessions around community engagement in the smart meter roll out. These could be based around the content of the information materials outlined above with the aim being to ensure that a core group of community representatives are well informed and can help to cascade and endorse the information.

Peer to peer sharing

Although household energy use data can be very sensitive, the study has identified some appetite for peer to peer sharing of energy use data. This could be facilitated through establishing an online portal where individuals can share (on a purely voluntary basis) their smart meter information and work with others to benchmark their energy use and share ideas to reduce their energy demand. It is likely that this would need some moderation to ensure it is used fairly but could help to generate interest in the smart meter roll out as well as providing a useful service to people who would find benchmarking and collaboration useful.

Local energy data

Over the longer term, data from smart meters could contribute to more accurate, regularly updated information on energy use and carbon emissions at community level. The currently available data is only accessible to the public at the level of local authority area and is generally 18 months out of date when it is released (due to the time taken to collate the information).The Green Communities evaluation identified a desire amongst many groups for more detailed energy use data with more regular updates. This could help to increase the contribution that the community sector can make to carbon emissions reduction by enabling community groups to target their projects far more effectively using more detailed, up to date, aggregated, non-disclosive energy use data from their area. Having access to data at Lower Super Output Area (or ideally well below that) on a monthly or quarterly basis would be very powerful in providing much more detailed baseline information to help groups to identify the measures and sectors where they could have the greatest positive impact on carbon emissions and/or energy cost. As the roll-out will not be geographic this is a longer term aim and could only achieve scale once a large number of smart meters are installed. However, sharing data could be used as part of a package of incentives for communities to drive early smart meter take up in their area, particularly within area-based pilot activity. If partial data could be shared, there would be an incentive for groups to increase the number of smart meters locally and therefore improve the population of the database.

Resourcing:

Pilot programme

A pilot programme could be established early in the roll out of smart meters, offering the opportunity for communities to bid to run projects to promote uptake of smart meters in their area. The aim of this would be to pilot different approaches and activities with a view to identifying what activities could be most effective for the wider roll out. The pilot could also help to establish expectations around the possible impact that communities could have on the roll out. Key criteria for assessing applications might be the scale of deployment they aim to achieve, the added value they aim to realise and deliverability of their proposals. There should be flexibility in the type of project to be funded to allow groups to design appropriate activities for their community and to allow for innovation. Such pilot programmes should aim to work with community groups who have previous proven experience of using funding to achieve good outputs and outcomes.

The seed funding could pay for part-time staff to co-ordinate projects, marketing costs (e.g. leaflets, posters, flyers), events (room hire and expenses) and technical support to their projects. Some groups mentioned the desire among members for recognition (financial) for the time and effort they put in to making projects happen.

Any funded pilot scheme should be established with a realistic timescale. Many groups fed back their frustration at recent programmes with short timescales for both application and delivery. They felt strongly that timescales had constrained what they could achieve within their projects. These schemes were generally established part-way through a financial year and were constrained by having to complete within that financial year. If a pilot programme is established then timescales should be planned so that schemes are either launched early in a financial year or have provision to continue into subsequent financial years.

Longer term support

The results of this pilot could be used to inform subsequent rounds of the scheme, supporting replication of successful pilot activities by less advanced groups and further innovation by pioneering groups. If possible, provision could be made for peer-to-peer sharing of learning across community groups. It could also be used to foster partnership working between communities and energy suppliers. This could be funded by energy suppliers working with community groups, who would promote smart meters and provide independent endorsement.

7. Appendix 1 – Desk research references

Literature was sourced from a wide range of bodies, both academic and business focused. They are both existing and historic community based programme evaluations. The following documents were used in the desk research:

Please note that not all community projects covered by the below involved smart meters or in-home-energy displays.

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Appendix 2 – Survey questionnaire, interview topic guide and list of interviewees

Online survey questionnaire

Available on request.

Topic guide for in-depth interviews

Questions
• Tell us about your community group/ The group you work with the most if you are an energy professional
o What sort of people belong to the group? o What role do you play in the group?
• Does your group deliver environmental related projects?
o What types of projects?
o What are the drivers/motivations and why does your group get involved in these types of projects?
• Tell us about your most recent projects related to environmental (energy efficiency/sustainable energy)
o Did the project involve smart meters or related energy monitors etc? [*ensure the respondents understands about smart meter devices/the roll-out]
o Please elaborate on this project and its aims and what it actually delivered?
o How many in your group were involved?
o How many did the project reach/engage?
o Did you work alone as a group or in partnership (hire consultants etc) – why? (see roles below)
o What were the incentives/drivers to run such projects
o What barriers did you come across
o How did you overcome them? /lessons you learned

Questions
• Do you think your group would get involved in smart meter related projects in the future? & would they be receptive?
• The smart meter roll-out is supplier-led and country wide (non-regional). • Do you feel this would be an issue with communities working with energy companies/suppliers? • What role do you think could communities play? • Do you think local authorities would be able to play an effective roll as well?
• How do you think community groups could help engage other householders/consumers in the smart meter roll-out?
• How can EST/DECC engage with community groups in the future? And stay connected? How do you hear about info? How would you like to hear about it?
• Do you think there are gaps in skills that communities have/need to get involved and be helpful in the roll-out?

List of participating respondents in the in-depth interviews

The Energy Saving Trust would like to thank everyone who participated in a telephone interview for this research.

Those interviewed were:

Communities:

- Alexis Keech on behalf of Roundhay Environmental Action Project
- Andrew Bayly on behalf of Wandsworth FoE
- Ashley Bamforth, on behalf of Witcham Village Hall Project
- Berwick-upon-Tweed Community Development Trust Ltd
- Bollington Carbon Revolution
- Cara Naden on behalf of Transition Langport
- Cathy Knamiller, on behalf of The Anchor Project
- CLEAR Buckhaven
- Craig Woolf on behalf of Northern Community Power
- Eglinton Community Ltd
- Héléne Rinaldo on behalf of Postwick Green
- Kate Watson on behalf of Bristol Green Doors
- Lucy Conway on the Isle of Eigg
- Margaret Healey Pollett from Kings Heath Transition Initiative
- Mary Popham on behalf of Transition Town Totnes
- Melody Stokes, Carbon Reduction Club, Fillongley
- Ovesco and Transition Town Lewes
- Peter Capener on behalf of Bath and West Community Energy
- Richard Pearce on behalf of Low Carbon Lymm

- Sustainable Brampton and the Brampton and Beyond Community Trust
- Sutton West Partnership
- Terena Plowright, the Greening Campaign
- Tim Lunel, Hook Norton Low Carbon and National Energy Foundation
- Tom Broughton on behalf of Transition Chichester
- Transition Cleeve
- Walgrave Green Community Interest Company

And 6 further interviewees who wished to remain anonymous.

Energy Professionals:

- Action for Sustainable Living
- Alison Howard, Monmouthshire County Council
- Becky Lomas, Derbyshire County Council
- Colin Lafferty, Villages Housing Association
- David Walton, Suffolk County Council
- Hazel Clatworthy, Monmouthshire County Council
- Kathy Tate, Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Kevin Burchell, Kingston University
- Kit Knowles, Ecospheric
- Lucy Darch, USwitch (formerly of British Gas)
- Michael Butterfield of Longit Green Valleys
- Mo Cloonan, Community Energy Scotland
- Paul Bourgeois, Low Carbon Britain
- Peter Chisnall, Climate Energy
- Peter Lipman, Sustrans and CSE
- Professor Gupta, Oxford Brookes University (EVALOC)
- Rachel Nunn, Community energy practitioner
- Richard Hales, South Cambs District Council
- Richard Willson, Norwich City Council
- Rob Love, River Cottage
- Ruth Binny, EnergyShare
- Stavros Sachinis, British Gas

Appendix 3 – Data Tables

Available on request.

Department of Energy & Climate Change
3 Whitehall Place
London SW1A 2AW
www.decc.gov.uk

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