



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

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Greening our existing homes – National retrofit strategy

The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) is the statutory, independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales. We campaign on behalf of both household and non-household water consumers.

We agree with the proposals set out in the document where Government working in partnership with diverse stakeholders should introduce a national retrofit strategy to make existing homes greener. We think that including water efficiency measures alongside energy efficiency will be key.

As acknowledged in the document, retrofits that include water efficiency can deliver numerous economic, social and environmental benefits helping to achieve ‘sustainability in the round’.

In our response we focus on the benefits for water consumers, although we recognise that retrofitting schemes can also bring wider economic benefits, such as improving skills, creating jobs and boosting existing firms (especially SMEs and their supply chains).

Environmental benefits

Improving water efficiency and reducing water use at home has many benefits for the environment. Water companies are able to reduce the volume of water they abstract, treat, pump and deliver to homes. This in turn helps to protect the environment from over abstraction, help reduce the sector’s carbon emissions and improve the resilience of water supplies today and in the future.

Reducing (hot) water use at home can also contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. These depend on factors such as water temperature, type of device (water heated by gas or electricity), household water use, and boiler type. Hot water use at home

(from showers and taps) is the second largest source of household Greenhouse Gas emissions, after space heating, accounting for 17% of home energy use¹.

The total annual carbon emission per household due to water use are around 1 tonne CO₂e² per year, considering an (average) personal water use of 138 litres/person/day³. If there are around 28 million homes in the UK, there could be considerable savings in water, energy and carbon emissions if a national retrofit strategy were to be taken forward.

Social benefits

Saving water at home can help (metered) water customers save money by reducing their water bills. For 2021-22, the average water and sewerage bill is £408, but bills vary due to many reasons across England and Wales⁴. These reasons include household water use and company specific characteristics, such as location and priorities for investment.

Saving (hot) water can also help to save money in energy bills. The Energy Saving Trust⁵ estimates that hot water use at home contributes to about 20% of the average combined energy bill (£1202 in 2021).

Addressing water and energy efficiency at home can help to address issues such as fuel poverty and water affordability. A few years ago, CCW took part in a collaborative partnership project⁶ with Southern Water, Brighton and Hove City Council and the University of Sussex. The aim was to analyse the relationship between water efficiency and affordability. The project included home visits from a qualified engineer to install water saving gadgets⁷, provide water efficiency advice and a 'water tariff check'. The expectation being that these gadgets would reduce water use by about 20%, which equates to a 20% saving in the average (annual) water bill.

¹ Committee on Climate Change (2019) UK housing, fit for the future? Available at: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/uk-housing-fit-for-the-future/> (accessed on 3 February 2021)

² Artesia (2019) Pathways to reducing per capita consumption. <https://www.water.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Water-UK-Research-on-reducing-water-use.pdf>. Note that many of the calculations of greenhouse gas emissions from water use are based on core government data and conversion factors from circa 2008 which do not include decarbonisation.

³ Average water use for 2019-20 is 142 litres/person/day in England and Wales.

⁴ Discover Water: <https://discoverwater.co.uk/annual-bill> (accessed on 3 February 2021)

⁵ Energy Saving Trust (2013) At Home with Water [https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/reports/AtHomewithWater\(7\).pdf](https://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/reports/AtHomewithWater(7).pdf) (accessed on 3 February 2021).

⁶ <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/research/research-projects/community-water-partnership> (accessed 3 February 2021)

⁷ These included: tap aerators, shower heads and toilet dual flush converters.

Recommendations

- Government should provide leadership in this area, considering the effect that reducing personal water use can have on the resilience of water supplies and on climate change (by reducing the carbon emissions linked to treating, distributing water and heating water at home).
- Collaborative working between a variety of stakeholders can bring additional benefits. The retrofit strategy can be linked to other initiatives to provide advice on water and energy efficiency. In addition to the retrofit, getting one person to the door to give advice on a series of issues can be more cost-effective and less disruptive than having people from different organisations visiting to address similar and/or related issues. It is important that the lessons learned are used to expand the evidence base to help ensure the success of similar projects undertaken by others.
- We think that it was a missed opportunity not to have included water efficiency measures in the Green Homes Grant. Increasing the visibility of water efficiency as a means to help with energy efficiency should be the way forward, as doing so has numerous economic, social and environmental benefits.

Enquiries

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