

Warmer Homes Scheme, Ireland



Description of the programme

The Warmer Homes Scheme (WHS) has been running since 2001 and is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

It is a nationwide scheme, co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union, which delivers free energy efficiency improvements to the homes of people in, or at risk of, energy poverty.

The scheme aims to make applicants' homes warmer, healthier, and cheaper to run. This in turn should improve their quality of life and also free up more of their disposable income for other non-fuel related items.

In delivering these energy efficiency works, WHS also helps to reduce Ireland's residential energy use and related carbon emissions. In that regard the scheme has performance targets relating to number of homes treated per year, kWh savings per year and CO2 savings per year

Critical success factors

- Targeting the most vulnerable homeowners
- Contractor capacity
- Quality of works
- Value for money
- Efficient delivery model
- Transparency and consistency
- Good communication

Innovation

- Good IT systems
- Large panel of skilled and experienced contractors
- Clear guidelines, terms and conditions, info packs
- Regular monitoring, reporting and evaluation
- Good customer service
- Strong technical oversight

Key achievements

Over 135,000 homeowners have had energy efficiency works carried out on their homes through the WHS.

In addition to upgrading thousands of homes, the scheme has also provided employment to contractors and other delivery staff across the country, many in rural locations. The scheme has also led to the upskilling of contractors and an increase in quality standards, with a broader benefit for communities beyond the scheme.

Very importantly, the WHS has greatly helped reduce energy use and carbon emissions from the homes treated.

Changes you would make in the future

- Better identification and targeting of those in need
- More simplified application process
- Delivering deeper upgrades
- Moving away from fossil fuel heating systems
- Leveraging of additional non-government funding
- Improving the feedback/scheme evaluation loop

Lesson learned

We find it important to explain to homeowners very simply what energy efficiency is; what benefits it brings; and most importantly what a homeowner can expect when the works are being delivered, particularly more extensive, deeper measures.

Given the vulnerability of many of the recipients, the homeowner is central in how our delivery and communications are designed, and what we require of our contractors. This does mean things are sometimes slower than normal but it ensures homeowners are more informed, involved and at ease during the process.

Replicating your approach

- Know who you are targeting and how you will reach them
- Develop a sustainable and scalable delivery model
- Develop clear processes to ensure transparency and consistency
- Keep the homeowner central to all processes and communications
- Have clear objectives and targets
- Measure and evaluate the impact

Final comments

SEAI delivers several residential energy efficiency grants schemes. Widespread promotion and delivery of energy efficiency measures through a scheme like WHS can see greater take up of other schemes

Increasing public awareness and visibility of energy efficiency works moves the general energy efficiency agenda forward with the benefits not limited to one scheme.

The high technical standards and strong customer focus that the scheme requires of its contractors means that the bar is being raised for the retrofit industry and this higher performance is felt outside the scheme, in SEAI's other grant schemes and in the private market in general.

The treatment of the Irish housing stock presents many challenges. Technical challenges encountered and tackled under a scheme like WHS help to drive improvements in technical solutions which can offer learnings and ideas for other schemes

Further information

- www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/free-upgrades-for-eligible-homes/
- www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/free-upgrades-for-eligible-homes/warmth-and-wellbeing/
- www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/energy/publications/Pages/Strategy-to-combat-energy-poverty.aspx

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