Designing a National Retrofit Advice Service: The Front Door to Your Warm Home

There are a number of different energy efficiency schemes supporting households upgrade and decarbonise their homes, including the Warm Homes: Local Grant, the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, the Energy Company Obligation, the Great British Insulation Scheme and any schemes that replace them from 2026. This can make the customer journey confusing as it becomes difficult for eligible households to identify and apply for relevant funding. Many of the technologies and products offered through these schemes for heating, energy efficiency, or electricity generation and storage will also be unfamiliar to many consumers.

If we are to meet the UK Government's target to retrofit 5 million homes during this parliament, this complexity must and can be reduced. We see examples of the role advice services can play in taking highly complex, competitive, and consequential consumer environments and make them engaging, simple and accessible. FranceRenov and Home Energy Scotland fill this niche for home retrofit in France and Scotland respectively. While all devolved nations have, or are developing national advice services, there is a gap in this market in England. Although there are pockets of local advice in parts of England, overall provision is variable and there remains a postcode lottery for households.

Introducing a national retrofit advice service here will be vital to accelerate uptake of low carbon technologies and lower household bills, whilst also helping to meet climate targets, reduce dependence on gas and improve energy security.

We propose a digital first government 'Front Door' portal to act as a single point of access to energy efficiency advice for households. We recommend the following principles when designing this portal:

1. Ensure the advice service is independent

2. Engage households by highlighting the benefits
3. Offer a tailored plan for every household
4. Provide a gateway to accredited installers
5. Design a digital-first service with access to expert retrofit advisors
6. Provide post-installation assistance and signpost to redress support
7. Make it user friendly and continually improve the service
8. Integrate with and work alongside regional advice services

Our key design recommendations:

1. **Ensure the advice service is independent.** To access retrofit, consumers need to navigate the competitive market for home energy products and services, including myriad manufacturers and models, and a range of providers with different tariffs and pricings. In this growing and busy market, a free, independent and trusted service will be invaluable to support households across England understand what is right for their home and take action. The Front Door should be a place for consumers to access impartial information about energy efficiency and low carbon technologies like solar panels and heat pumps.

2. **Engage consumers by highlighting the benefits.** This information should be presented in a way which is accessible, engaging and consistent - such as FAQ pages, updates on scheme information and short form video content. With regards to accessing information and understanding the benefits of home upgrades, we would expect an AI integrated Front Door site to be able to answer common consumer questions such as:
    - What is a heat pump?
    - How much can I save a year if I install solar panels?
    - What funding am I eligible for?
    - What type of insulation is right for my home?
    - Why should I get a smart meter?

3. **Offer a tailored plan for every household.** A central part of the Front Door service should be the option for users to get a tailored Warm Home Upgrade Plan, detailing the most effective way they can upgrade their property. By inputting information about their property and personal circumstances, this tailored plan would help households understand what upgrades are suitable for their home and make them aware of funding or finance options (i.e. local grants or UK Government backed loans). This would include how grants and schemes can be combined and what cost and carbon savings they should generally expect to achieve from these different actions.

4. P**rovide a gateway to accredited installers.** Users of the Front Door can access a directory of local accredited installers, empowering them to make an informed choice about which suppliers to move forwards with. This will drive more consumers toward accredited installers, which will reduce instances of poor quality installation or overcharging, and make any redress processes quicker, easier and more transparent. This will also serve as free advertising for installers and encourage non-accredited installers to become compliant with the standards the UK Government expects in the retrofit market.

5. **Design a digital-first service with access to expert retrofit advisors.** While the Front Door acts as the single, initial point of access for energy efficiency upgrades for most households, it must be supported by the provision of additional support digitally or via phone to help those with more complex homes or situations navigate their retrofit journey. While vulnerable people and the digitally excluded will need dedicated attention, a major home retrofit can be a complex, costly and disruptive process for anyone. Having the ability to discuss with a trained and trusted advisor throughout the process is a tried and tested way of improving customer confidence which will lead to more households taking action.

6. **Provide post-installation assistance and signpost to redress support.** The retrofit journey does not end when the works are complete. Households will often benefit from post-installation support, to help them adjust to their retrofit and enjoy the full advantages of their new systems. The service should also signpost consumers to redress if something goes wrong or isn't as expected.

7. **Make it user friendly and continually improve the service.** The Front Door portal will be most effective if it is accessible, easy to navigate and intuitive. Analysis of site usage data would provide valuable information on common consumer queries and points of disengagement along the retrofit journey to help improve services and report any emerging problems. For simplicity and consistency, the Front Door portal should also be consistent with government awareness raising campaigns and associated branding - signposting consumers to the service.

8. **Integrate with and work alongside regional advice services.** Many local authorities have their own advice services or websites acting as regional landing pages for those looking to upgrade their homes. The Front Door can work seamlessly alongside these established regional services, rather than duplicating or replacing them. Where local advice is in place, the national advice service would triage consumers' advice needs and free up local services to focus on delivery, also ensuring a simple customer journey for households.