



23rd December 2010

The Chartered Institution of
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Consultation on the New Homes Bonus Response by the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers

This response to the consultation on the introduction of the "New Homes Bonus is submitted by the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE). CIBSE is the learned and professional body for building services engineers, with a global membership of almost 20,000. The Institution exists to 'support the Science, Art and Practice of building services engineering, by providing our members and the public with first class information and education services and promoting the spirit of fellowship which guides our work.'

CIBSE set standards for building services engineering in the UK, publishing the CIBSE Guide, Commissioning Codes and other guidance material which are recognised internationally as authoritative, and sets criteria for best practice in the provision of energy using systems in buildings.

Buildings account for almost 50% of UK carbon emissions. Whilst the systems which heat, ventilate, cool and power everything within the building are largely responsible for these emissions, innovative services design and operation can dramatically improve their energy efficiency. Our members design and create the most environmentally friendly systems in many major projects across the globe.

Whilst many building services engineers design energy using systems for buildings, others have a professional interest in their operation. Facilities managers are responsible for day to day running of buildings, and seek ways to improve their energy performance and reduce waste. Many CIBSE members are accredited energy assessors, and a number have contributed to the preparation of this response. Other CIBSE members have contributed to the preparation of the following response.

As an engineering institution we are pleased to offer our contribution to those elements of this consultation which could relate to other technical policy measures. We have not addressed question of a purely financial nature, as they are outside our sphere of technical competence.

Consultation question 4

Do you agree with the proposal to reward local authorities for bringing empty properties back into use through the New Homes Bonus?

Yes, strongly. We endorse the remarks about the blight of empty homes, especially in areas of high housing demand.

There is an opportunity here to link the bonus to the development of the Green Deal, especially where the incentive for bringing empty homes applies to the social housing sector. The 3,000 properties referred to in the paper should be ready candidates to pilot the measures being proposed for the Green Deal, to test the advisory procedures, commissioning of technical measures and for the monitoring of performance post installation. There is a clear opportunity here to bring the two policies together.

There will be additional information available from Technology Strategy Board funded work on the refurbishment of existing homes.

Are there any practical constraints?

The practical constraints will relate to the money available to upgrade the property prior to bringing it back into use. There are examples in the building stock today of Victorian properties which can show 50 – 75% reduction in carbon emissions following refurbishment (albeit at greater cost than the figures being discussed in relation to the Green Deal).

However, there is a link between the extent of measures which are cost effective and the timing of the intervention with those measures. Where, for example, a property needs to have a new heating system installed, as well as extensive internal redecoration, and it is unoccupied, the costs of intervention are reduced due to the vacancy, and the marginal cost of more efficient replacements will be less. It also allows a more thorough refurbishment of the heating system, for example, to match the whole system more appropriately to the new high efficiency condensing boiler, and gain improved performance.

It is easier to apply comprehensive insulation and draft proofing to a vacant property, and to replace windows. Again, if the property needs redecoration anyway, the whole package is far more cost effective if undertaken at this point.

Additional considerations

Empty properties which are to be rented out should be required to obtain a new EPC after refurbishment. In an ideal world this EPC should

- a) be available, without personal data relating to the occupants
- b) show the previous EPC rating where one existed prior to refurbishment, or provide a link to that rating, thereby showing the level of improvement achieved
- c) flag the fact that the property had been improved under the new homes bonus scheme

All these attributes are highly relevant to researchers looking at the stock as a whole.

We trust that these comments, whilst not addressing the primary concerns of fashioning an effective incentive for new homes to be built, flag useful technical opportunities arising from the introduction of this policy.

If you require any further information about this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Hywel Davies
CIBSE Technical Director
21 December 2010

Administrative Information. This response is submitted by Dr Hywel Davies, Technical Director, CIBSE, 222, Balham High Road, London, SW12 9BS. hdavies@cibse.org