

SMEAP Annual Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary



Executive summary

Purpose and background

This report evaluates Smart Energy Action Plan (SMEAP) client outcomes for the second full year of project delivery, covering November 2024 to October 2025. Note this means clients who took part in the evaluation (survey or interview), rather than necessarily received their advice, in this period.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather both quantitative and in-depth qualitative feedback from clients. An online survey was sent to clients following their SMEAP advice; this achieved a sample of 70 respondents. In addition, semi-structured online or telephone interviews were conducted with 8 clients who expressed interest in an interview through their survey response.

"I just found the whole process very helpful." (Interviewee #1)

"It's made us focus on what we do and when we do it. And to use the cheaper periods as much as we can." (Interviewee #3)

"I felt reassured that it was going to be the right thing."
(Interviewee #5)

Findings: what went well

SMEAPs continue to be a unique offer within the UK energy advice landscape: 73% of survey respondents felt they couldn't have obtained their advice elsewhere.

The feedback shows that a range of clients continue to have positive experiences receiving SMEAP advice. 94% of survey respondents said they were satisfied with their experience. SMEAP advice was praised for its impartiality, trustworthiness, appropriate level of detail (93% agreed) and ease of comprehension (90% agreed). Advisors were commended for being friendly, helpful and patient.

Many clients reported having more knowledge of their smart energy options (92% agreed) and increased confidence (73% agreed) following the advice. For some, the SMEAP process played a valuable role in validating previous energy decision-making or helping them to come to a decision.

75% of survey respondents said that they are planning on taking up at least one of their recommendations. There was high reported uptake in surveys of smart heating controls and increased uptake of static time-of-use tariffs. Interviewees also reported taking up more expensive smart products. There was also evidence of clients experimenting with flexing their usage and getting more usage aware.

Interviews revealed that taking up recommended offers and actions had led to material benefits including energy cost savings and increased comfort and convenience.



Executive summary

Findings: what worked less well

Clients were slightly less likely than last year to report that SMEAP advice information was new to them and couldn't have been found elsewhere.

Surveys and interviews both highlighted some challenges with a lack of 'aftercare' following advice calls. Retrofit clients were sometimes confused about which organisation they were in touch with. Others felt that more follow-ups could have been useful to help consolidate new information.

Some interviewees felt that written advice resources could be improved through, for example, more visual content. Generally, there was a lack of clear evidence about the value of written reports. A small number of clients struggled with the advice they were given on tariffs.

Perhaps as a result of struggling with advice, interviewees didn't take much action in relation to recommended smart tariffs. There also continues to be limited evidence of impact for clients without, or not looking to install, LCTs like solar PV.

Recommendations

- Consider introducing a follow-up stage to discuss progress or barriers encountered in taking up recommendations and provide background on different referral organisations.
- Review the format of some advice to allow for simplified reports, clear and up-to-date tariff information, and more home visits where funding allows.
- Improve the targeting of support for non-LCT clients and evidencing the impact accordingly. More emphasis could be placed on low-cost offers.
- Update the evaluation methodologies generally to enable richer analysis, including more clarity on LCT-related behaviour change and motivations.

"While it would cost more to do home visits, face to face and ability to look together at the property and potential would help hugely." (Survey respondent)

"Contact from multiple organisations who are affiliated with CSE can become confusing. A PDF of how who is who in the process will help." (Survey respondent)

"It's quite a lot of block text, whereas something more graphical would probably be better." (Interviewee #2)



Introduction



Scope of this report

This report evaluates SMEAP client outcomes for the second full year of project delivery, covering November 2024 to October 2025. Note this means clients who took part in the evaluation (survey or interview) in this period, rather than necessarily received their advice in this period.

The **Methodology** section provides an overview of the two methods used to collect feedback from clients: a survey and interviews.

The **Results** sections presents findings from the client survey and interviews.

The **Conclusions** section draws together key findings from the evaluation and offers some recommendations and next steps.



SMEAPs background

The SMEAP project

In the RII0-ED2, one of the bespoke Consumer Value Propositions (CVP-5) for NGED is to deliver smart energy advice to consumers: 'offering 1.2 million PSR customers a bespoke smart energy action plan every two years which provides customers with knowledge and tools to enable them to participate in, and benefit from, the energy system transition.'¹ These plans aim to provide PSR customers with access to domestic flexibility and/or aggregation services, connection aid and advice for low carbon technology (LCT) adoption, linking customers to relevant community energy schemes and promoting energy savings and efficiency measures.

Following an initial piloting stage that ran from November 2022, since December 2023, CSE have been delivering SMEAPs for NGED customers. This reports covers the second year of the project proper (after a first-year pilot), covering November 2024 to October 2025.

The SMEAP process

A full description of the SMEAP advice process can be found in previous pilot evaluation reports, but a summary is included here for context. The SMEAP methodology used CSE's smart energy Capabilities Lens to assess a client's smart energy capabilities and match them with suitable smart energy offer 'types' or recommended actions to improve their capabilities.

This methodology is split across two strands. Introductory plans involve a short telephone call with a CSE smart energy advisor on a specific smart measure or low carbon technology (LCT), followed by the client receiving a 'Getting smarter with energy' factsheet. Detailed plans involve an assessment of a client's smart energy capabilities and current priorities. Based on these findings, the advisor draws out recommendations for the client to improve their smart energy capabilities and to access suitable smart offers, which are sent to the client in the form of a bespoke report, along with the 'Getting smarter with energy' factsheet. Note that for this evaluation, feedback was initially sought from clients who had received detailed plans to maximise the richness of the data collection. However, this feedback was extended to introductory SMEAP clients from April 2025.

¹ <https://yourpowerfuture.nationalgrid.co.uk/downloads-view/42120> .



Updates to SMEAP methodology

New offers and more LCT referrals

Throughout the last year, the CSE SMEAP team have continued to make some updates to the SMEAP methodology based on user and advisor feedback.

Some new smart energy offers have been included in the advice process as they have been tracked by advisors and the CSE Research team. These have either been included as new offer types or as contextual information in the report templates.

This year has also seen some development of the SMEAP referral network. This year has seen more SMEAP referrals for clients who have received LCTs retrofitted through grant schemes - such as the Home Upgrade Grant Scheme (HUGS), Warm Homes:Local Grant scheme (WH:LG), Energy Company Obligation (ECO) or Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). This is because LCT installation often makes a good engagement point for further advice, and the potential benefits of other smart offers combined with LCTs may be more significant than for other clients.



Methodology



Client feedback survey

About the survey

A survey was used to gather quick feedback from clients following their SMEAP advice. The survey included questions about the SMEAP advice experience, motivations for receiving a SMEAP, and intentions for following through on any recommendations. For most of the year, this survey was sent just to clients who had received a detailed SMEAP. From April 2025, the survey was also sent to introductory SMEAP clients.

The survey was hosted on Smart Survey and was distributed to clients with the follow-up information sent to them following their advice call. The survey was sent as an online link or as a print copy with a prepaid return envelope, depending on the preference of individual clients.

The survey was updated in April 2025, which included several adjustments to its structure. Intentions are now explored through free-text responses rather than multiple choice questions, and more statements have been added that explore impact.

Out of approximately 450 clients who received SMEAP support over the survey period, 70 completed surveys were received. 17 of these 70 responses are from the first version of the survey.

Analysis

Analysis was conducted in Microsoft Excel using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. The analysis combines the last set of responses from the first version of the survey with responses from the latest version. Questions distinct to each survey are highlighted where relevant.

Further exploratory analyses were also conducted. This included comparing the impacts of introductory SMEAPs with detailed SMEAPs, and clients who had home visits against those who didn't. Note that introductory plans and home visit clients comprise a very small proportion of the overall sample (8 and 4, respectively), so generalisability is very limited.

Other limitations

Not everyone who received a SMEAP completed the survey. The voluntary basis of giving feedback means that the sample contains self-selection bias, which may have distorted the findings.



Client follow-up interviews

Sampling

In the feedback survey clients were asked if they were open to having a follow-up interview. 46 clients said yes. From this group, a sample of 22 were invited to interview. Note that the self-selection bias within the survey sample will have been carried over to the interview sample, and possibly exacerbated.

To help counter self-selection bias, the sampling approach sought equal representation, where possible, from clients with:

- high and low satisfaction scores
- detailed and introductory plans
- adoption of few and many measures
- a variety of offer types (e.g. LCT and non-LCT).

Interviews were arranged and carried out with a final total of 8 clients.

Delivery and analysis

Interviews were run at least three months after advice calls to capture any client actions or intentions in progressing with the recommendations included in their SMEAP, as well as the opportunities or barriers clients perceived in making changes.

Interviews used a semi-structured topic guide to lead conversation, whilst allowing flexibility for clients to discuss the elements of their SMEAP that mattered most to them.

Interviews were conducted either via Microsoft Teams or telephone and recorded.

Thematic analysis of interviews was conducted in Microsoft Excel and Word.



Survey Results



Motivations

Most clients remain motivated by saving money and going greener

Clients were asked what motivated them to receive a SMEAP. Figure 1 shows that the most common motivations reported were saving money (62/70, 89%) and going greener (52/70, 74%), which reflects the previous year's findings.

Respondents also had the option to state their own motivations. This included becoming more independent in their home, exploring whether these changes will 'have any impact' and more specific motivators such as getting solar panels fitted.

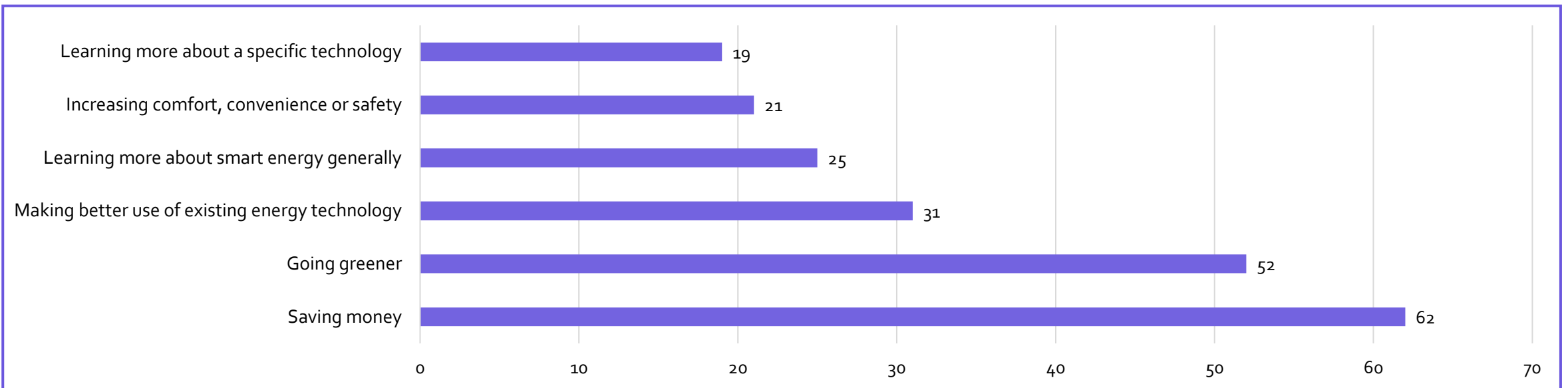


Figure 1: Survey responses to the question 'What were your main motivations for having a Smart Energy Action Plan? Pick as many as you want.'



Information received in the SMEAP

Survey respondents were asked to rate their agreement with four statements describing the information they received through their SMEAP. These findings are shown in Figure 2.

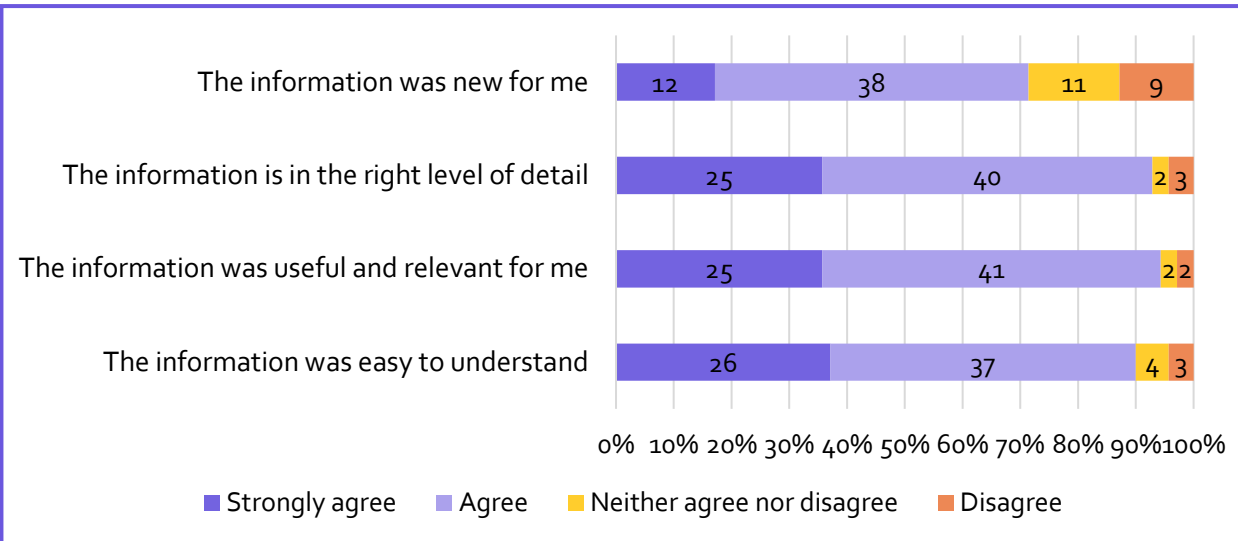


Figure 2: Survey responses to the question 'Thinking about the advice you received through your SMEAP, do you agree with the following statements?'

Increasing satisfaction with the information provided, though it is becoming less novel

Satisfaction with SMEAP advice remains high and has mostly increased since the year before. 90% (63/70) found the information easy to understand, 93% (65/70) said it was in the right level of detail, and 94% (66/70) found it useful and personally relevant. This compares to last year's figures of 84% (16/19), 89% (17/19), and 79% (15/19), respectively. The information was new to 71% (50/70), a decrease from 84% (16/19) the previous year. This could be due to increased awareness and exposure to smart energy as it is becoming increasingly popular.

Supporting comments were positive, primarily emphasising friendly customer service and knowledgeable advisors. One respondent noted the tangible benefits of the advice, namely lowering energy usage and costs.

"The help and advice provided will be very helpful to enable us to maximise the savings in costs and reduce unit consumption."

"Very pleasant and informative caller"



Unique-ness of SMEAP advice

SMEAPs remain a unique source of information

Respondents were asked whether they thought they would have obtained the smart energy advice anywhere else. The vast majority (73%, 51/70) said that they probably wouldn't, highlighting the value of the SMEAP service. This is slightly down from 86% last year (25/34).

Further exploration revealed that 89% (17/19) of those who believed they could have received this information elsewhere were still satisfied or very satisfied with the SMEAP process overall. This suggests that perceptions of uniqueness of SMEAP advice did not in general lead to poor SMEAP experiences.

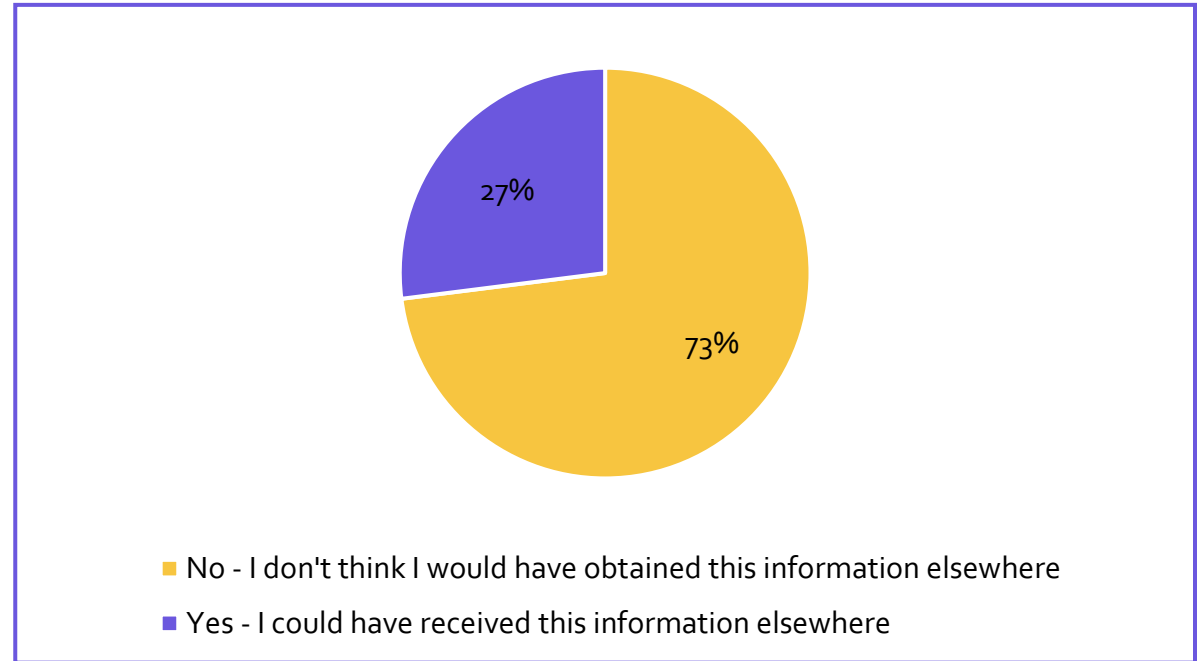


Figure 3: Survey responses to the question 'Do you think you would have been able to obtain the advice in your SMEAP anywhere else?'



Intentions to take up recommended actions

In the older survey, clients were asked about their intentions for taking up recommended actions for improving their smart energy capabilities. Figure 4 shows results from the survey. Note that not all clients were recommended all actions, so the total number of clients for each action differs.

A rise in understanding and flexing energy usage

The actions that the most clients reported having already taken since receiving the SMEAP advice were experimenting with flexing usage (8/17, 47%), getting usage aware (8/17, 47%), and smart meters and in-home displays (7/17, 41%). The actions that the most clients reported intending to action in the next year were also experimenting with flexing usage (8/17, 47%) and getting usage aware (7/17, 41%).

Comparison with last year's evaluation indicates that flexing has become increasingly popular. In the previous year's survey, 26% (9/34) immediately actioned this recommendation, with 34% (12/34) planned to action it in the next 12 months.

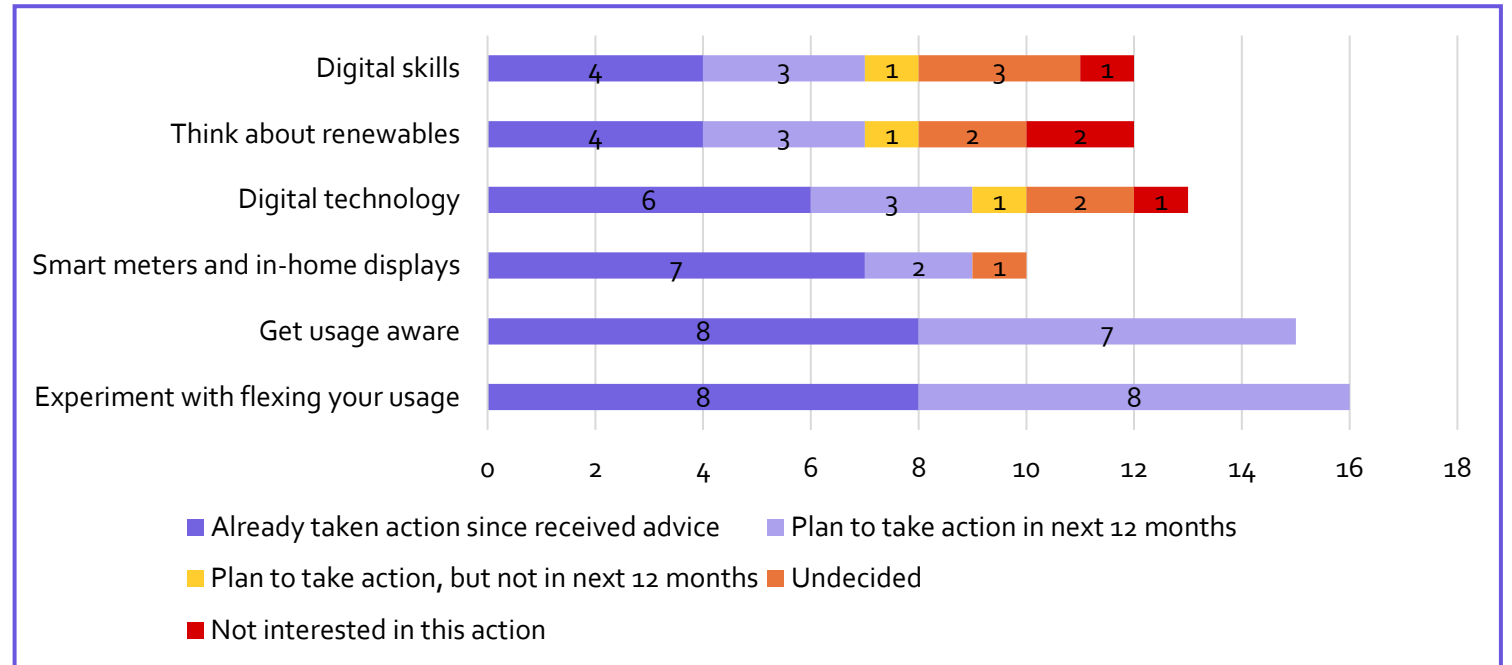


Figure 4: Survey responses to the question 'Please indicate if you plan to take up any recommended supporting actions to improve your smart energy capabilities.' The new survey does not include this question.



Intentions to take up recommended offers

LCT and related offers dominate

The older survey asked respondents to state their intentions regarding the specific smart offers recommended to them.

The highest proportion of clients reported already taking up **solar PV**. However, this figure may include clients supported post PV-install with behaviour change advice. The same also applies to **heat pumps**.

Smart heating and no-tech shifting offers also popular

Aside from LCTs, clients reported the most intention to take up:

- **Static time-of-use tariff** – 4/12 (33%) reported already taking up, 2 (17%) in the next year. This was higher than last year, with only 3/23 (13%) already taking up, and 1/23 (4%) intending to.
- **Smart heating controls** – 5/14 (36%) reported already taking up, /14 (36%) reported intentions to in the next year. Similar to last year.
- **Demand shifting scheme** – 4/16 (25%) reported already taking up, 5/16 (31%) in the next year. Similar to last year.
- **Import/export tariff** – 5/10 (50%) reported already taken up since receiving advice. This is likely a confusion with generic SEG export tariffs. Reflects high proportion of solar PV clients advised.

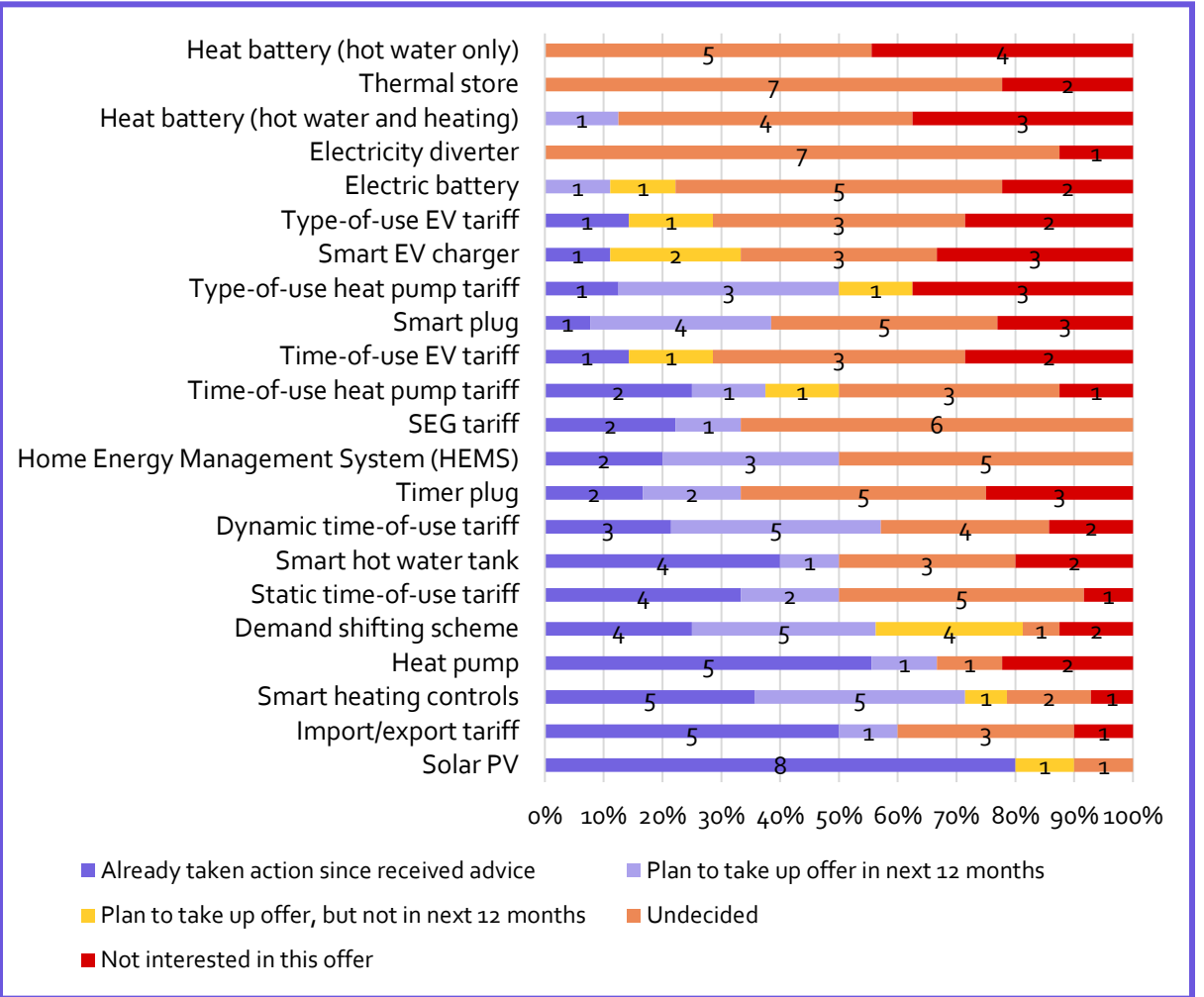


Figure 5: Survey responses to the question 'Please indicate the likelihood of you taking up any recommended smart offers'. The new survey does not include this question.



Intentions to take up recommended offers

Methodological limitations

Generally, data from the survey questions on client intentions around specific recommended actions and offers is unreliable.

For instance, it was unclear if all of the 8 clients who reported actioning solar PV actually got new solar panels; some included supporting actions (e.g. optimising solar usage). Other evidence of incorrect completion (e.g. 9 clients being recommended thermal stores) also suggests general limitations with this question type, which is partly why it was discontinued in the new survey.



Self-reported intentions

Self-reported intentions include solar PV, tariffs, and further research

The new survey allowed clients to self-describe their intentions. They largely mirrored the findings in Figure 5, with solar PV (alongside a battery) as the most popular intention, heat pumps, as well as export tariffs and switching to time/type-of-use tariffs. For some, the SMEAP has encouraged them to do further exploring of their own, such as discussing options with their energy supplier. For others, the SMEAP has seemed to enhance clients' understanding of any existing smart tech they own and how they ought to maintain them to maximise their effectiveness.

"Recheck Octopus Cosy Tariff and timings for using heat source pump. Track down a heat source engineer to do an annual service and recheck settings for best efficiency. Contact installers to check possible mice entry and damage"

"I am just about to enter into discussions with my energy supplier and others on the best options for me."

"Sceptical about smart meters, and been told I can't have one with solar panels."

"Considering getting a battery with solar panels to get a cheaper rate. But conscious of the payback period as I am 82 and don't know where I'll be in 10 years!"

[2 https://www.cse.org.uk/resource/smart-energy-advice-forum-key-findings/](https://www.cse.org.uk/resource/smart-energy-advice-forum-key-findings/)

Clients are struggling with grants, costs and trust in smart meters

Despite their intentions, several clients had or were still encountering obstacles when taking up recommendations. This includes difficulty obtaining a grant for solar panels. A few comments also stated their scepticism towards smart meters, suggesting more focus may be required in SMEAPs on myth busting. Costs and payback periods were a frequent concern. These barriers are well known across the sector, being previously identified in CSE and NGED's 2024 Smart Energy Advice Forum.²



Impacts

SMEAPs are successfully increasing smart energy knowledge and confidence

The survey also explored the impact of receiving a SMEAP. The newer survey includes three (new) impact statements shown in Figure 6. Analysis of these statements shows that 92% (49/53) now have more knowledge of their smart energy options and 75% (40/53) are planning on taking up at least one of their recommendations. 73%(40/53) also feel more confident or able to take part in smart energy options.

Impacts relatively consistent across client types

Cross-tabs were used to analyse impact results against other survey questions, as well as the types of advice that clients received.

Motivations or opinions on the uniqueness of SMEAP advice had no significant bearing on views on these impact measures. The impact for intro and detailed SMEAP clients is similar, although those receiving detailed plans are more likely to take up a recommendation (78%, 35/45) than those receiving intro plans (63%, 5/8). This likely reflects the different levels of detail offered. Four respondents had a home visit as part of their SMEAP. The two of these clients who answered the impact questions below agreed or strongly agreed to the statements below.

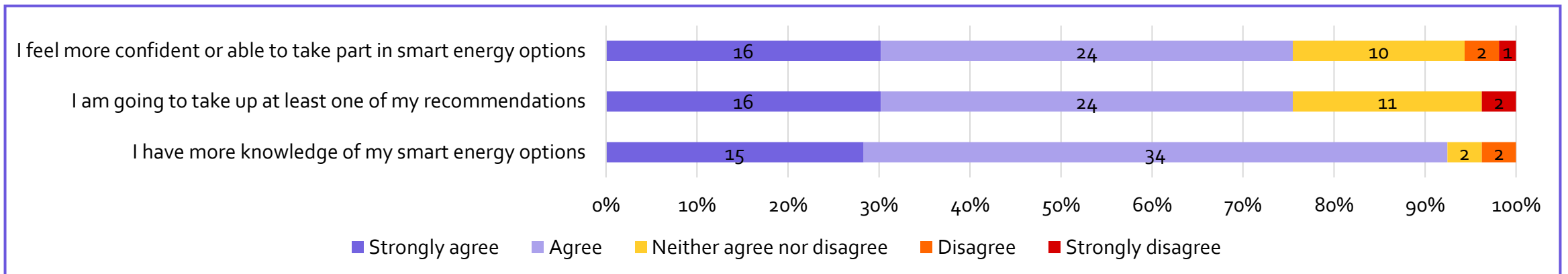


Figure 6: Survey responses to the question 'Thinking of the impact of receiving a SMEAP, please indicate your agreement with the following statements.'



Overall satisfaction

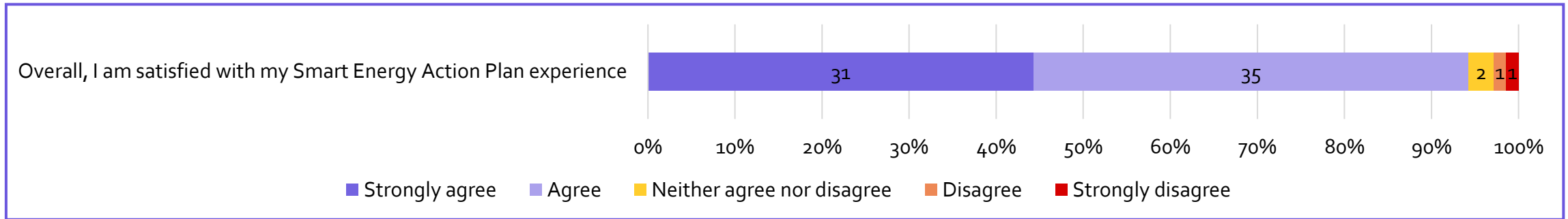


Figure 7: Survey responses to the question 'Thinking of the impact of receiving a SMEAP, please indicate your agreement with the following statements.'

Overall satisfaction very high still...

Figure 7 illustrates that overall satisfaction remains high at 94% (66/70), with 44% (31/70) strongly agreeing that they are satisfied. This is down from 100% satisfaction last year, although the sample size was considerably smaller with only 34 respondents.

Only two out of the 70 respondents reported that they were not satisfied. Their survey response shows that this was largely due to issues with referrals and actions taken; one was struggling to get a grant for solar panels whilst another had a bad experience with referral companies for insulation and solar PV. Implementing a follow-up stage in the SMEAP process and ensuring reliable referrals could prevent these problems from arising again.

...even when information less novel or unique

Overall satisfaction was also compared with responses to other questions. 89% (8/9) of those who reported that the information in their SMEAP wasn't new to them still reported satisfaction. As did 89% (17/19) of those who reported that they could have received this information elsewhere (as stated in slide 12). This positively reflects that even when clients did not feel the information or advice received was completely new or unique, they were still generally satisfied with their experience.

Motivations had little impact on overall satisfaction, nor did the type of SMEAP received (see slide 20). All four of the clients who received home visits were either satisfied or very satisfied overall.



Positives of the SMEAP process

Survey respondents were encouraged to share what they found useful about the SMEAP process. The following themes were identified:

Encourages thinking and action

Clients reported that the SMEAP encouraged them to put some more thought into their domestic energy usage, or helped guide their decision-making.

"Helped me make a decision - had been toying with what to do beforehand but this gave me direction."

Impartial and trustworthy

Several respondents appreciated the SMEAP as an unbiased source of information from knowledgeable and reliable energy experts.

"Independent advice. ASHP supplier wasn't entirely honest with the facts they gave me. So SMEAP gave me better knowledge and the confidence to challenge."

Concise yet comprehensive

Most clients appreciated the comprehensiveness of the SMEAP. It helped to distil all the important information on smart energy in one place in a way that is easy to follow going forward.

"It's a big minefield of info on smart energy out there, but the advice has really helped navigate it all."

Customer service

The advisors were commended for their knowledge and patience. Many felt free of any pressure to make a particular decision.

"I liked how the questions were open rather than rigid, and the advisor was keen to just chat - his active listening made it feel very personal."



Improvements to the SMEAP process

Survey respondents also had the option to share how the SMEAP process could be improved.

Follow-up support

Clients felt that they needed follow-up support after the SMEAP process was complete, such as obtaining grants and use of recently acquired technologies. One was also encountering communication issues with installers. Many emphasised the need for the advisors to check in after several weeks/months; clients also reported 'forgetting months down the line'. Follow-ups would help to increase the likelihood of clients considering and/or actioning their recommendations.

Contact information

Respondents wanted more easily accessible contact information for referrals. Some also wanted the same for CSE and the advisors to ensure clients can easily get back in touch for further support.

Additional information

Some clients noted areas where they would have benefitted from slightly richer information, such as costs and 'heating options'. A couple of respondents recognised the rapidly changing smart tech environment and so the challenge it poses to advisors trying to keep their advice and knowledge up-to-date. The adjacent comment also shows a desire for this information and support to be conveyed through a home visit, both before and after larger installations.

"Still struggling to get the help needed - keep getting rejected for grants for solar panels."

"Contact from multiple organisations who are affiliated with CSE can become confusing. Perhaps a PDF of how who is who in the process will help."

"Some options suggested were very new and unknown. Would like more information and average costs. While it would cost more to do home visits, face to face and ability to look together at the property and potential would help hugely."



Client Interview Results



Client interviewee characteristics

Interviews were conducted with eight clients in total. Each client had different priorities and capabilities in relation to smart energy and accordingly received different recommended actions and offers.

#	Characteristics prior to SMEAP advice	Priorities discussed during the interview	Plan type
1	Retired single householder with heat pump and solar PV	Saving money, self-sufficiency, making better use of existing technology, comfort and convenience	Detailed
2	Large family with solar PV and heat pump (installed after second advice call)	Comfort and convenience, going greener, saving money	Detailed
3	Retired couple in all-electric house with cavity wall insulation, heat pump and solar PV	Making better use of existing technology	Detailed
4	Father and adult son with EV, solar PV, battery and heat pump	Saving money, making better use of existing technology	Detailed
5	Single householder in all-electric house with solar PV, diverter and storage heaters	Saving money, making better use of existing technology	Introductory
6	Retired single householder in leasehold apartment	Creating a more cohesive heating system	Detailed
7	Couple in rural area with large solar PV array and battery	Saving money, self-sufficiency, making better use of existing technology	Detailed
8	Couple with solar PV	Saving money, making better use of existing technology	Detailed

Table 2: Capabilities and priorities of interview clients



Uptake of recommended actions

Clients were asked if they had taken up any recommended actions to improve the smart energy capabilities suggested in their reports.

In general, interviewees found this section of the plan difficult to talk about. Some struggled to recollect their recommended actions; others, when prompted with details from their report, started talking about offers such as smart tariffs rather than actions.

Solar PV owners more aware of how to maximise generation

Interviewees with solar PV reported taking up recommended actions such as getting usage aware, monitoring and flexing their energy usage. Many reported becoming more aware of when to turn on household appliances to maximise use of their solar generation:

"Solar panels acting as a catalyst to think about energy use. Then I began to track how much energy is coming in, ... how hungry different appliances are, so I could get as much out of the solar panels as possible." (Interviewee #2)

"It's made me a bit more wary of when I'm using things. ... It had never crossed my mind, but they were saying to ... manage what you're using when. ... I hadn't thought of that because to me, well if the sun's out, I was just putting everything on." (Interviewee #6)

Interviewee #6's case is significant as she was completely unaware of the need to stagger appliance use in order not to exceed the capacity of her solar PV generation. It seems likely that before receiving advice, she had unknowingly been using grid electricity to power some of her appliance use – costing her money.

Interviewee #4 described the impact of the advice on his energy habits as "transformational".

Another interviewee with solar PV who is on a time of use tariff also discussed becoming more aware of the timing of his usage, particularly in relation to the tariff's off-peak periods:

"It's made us focus on what we do and when we do it. And to use the cheaper periods as much as we can." (Interviewee #3)



Uptake of recommended offers

Clients were also asked about whether they had taken up any of the recommended smart offers included in their report.

Some interviewees had taken up a recommended smart offer

Interviewee #2 installed a battery.¹

Interviewee #4 installed a smart EV charger.

Interviewee #7 switched to an EV time of use tariff.²

As shown above, few interviewees reported taking up a recommended smart offer. However, Interviewee #8 reported getting a new inverter for her solar PV.

Interviewee #8 initially sought advice on how to maximise solar PV generation, which resulted in the discovery that her inverter was faulty and needed replacing:

"That was completely new information. ... No, I had no clue that it might've been the inverter." (Interviewee #8)

She bought a house with existing solar PV and was unaware that she could choose her export tariff provider. This information led her to start exploring alternatives:

"I didn't even know that we could switch providers. ... So knowing that we can even compare those rates and whatnot has been a huge help." (Interviewee #8)

Confusion around offer take up

Four other interviewees reported they had taken up some smart offers (including solar PV, heat pumps and batteries) as a result of SMEAP advice. On closer examination, however, these clients had already had these products installed (or been referred for installation) before receiving SMEAPs, so these have been discounted as SMEAP impacts.

Limited tariff take up

Only one of the six interviewees recommended a smart tariff reported taking one up by the time of their interview. Some of these interviewees (as on next slide) still have intentions around this.

¹ Although Interviewee #2 was advised on batteries through the SMEAP, there is some uncertainty about whether he had already received a referral to WH:LG for this offer.

² Interviewee #7 was not advised about EV tariffs specifically during the SMEAP but did receive advice about other smart tariffs suitable for a solar PV and battery owner.



Plans to take up offers in future

More than half of interviewees intend to take up more offers in future

Many interviewees reported that they plan to take up some of the recommended offers in future.

Interviewee #1 is saving up to buy a battery next year to store excess solar energy. She also plans on explore other tariff options and improving the seals on her double-glazed windows.

Interviewee #2 plans on investigating alternative smart import and export tariffs.

Interviewee #4 is considering installing additional solar PV panels in his garden.

Interviewee #5 plans on investigating storage heater tariffs next year.

Interviewee #8 intends to explore solar export tariffs in case a more competitive rate is available.



Case Study #1

Interviewee #1 is a retired householder who was referred for a SMEAP call after having solar PV and a heat pump installed through HUGS. Her priorities were learning how to make the most of her new technologies, saving money, and increasing self-sufficiency. In particular, she wanted help with her heat pump, as her home had felt too hot and dry since having it installed.

The advice call and report covered a wide range of recommended smart offers and supporting actions, including experimenting with flexing demand, low-cost options such as smart plugs, time of use tariffs, and higher investment options relating to her existing assets including a battery and smart heat pump controls. In addition to the advice call, this client also received a home visit during which her heat pump was reprogrammed to lower the setpoint temperature.

In the follow-up survey, the client reported she was highly satisfied with her SMEAP experience and had already taken action on several of her recommendations. She indicated that the information provided was new to her, and she felt that it would not have been possible to obtain this advice anywhere else.

In her interview, the client emphasised how much she had appreciated having a home visit. She said her home had been a more comfortable temperature and less dry since having her heat pump reprogrammed. The client had taken onboard advice about flexing her demand to maximise use of her solar generation. She was also exploring better tariff options and had a call arranged with her energy provider to discuss these.

The client also spoke enthusiastically about a longer-term goal: purchasing a battery to store excess solar energy. With increasing power cuts in her area and being of retirement age, she felt that a battery could be a way of “futureproofing” for older age to ensure she would not be left “stumbling around in the dark”. The client praised her advisor for explaining in detail how batteries work and their benefits.

"The battery and saving money is going to be really transformative."
(Interviewee #1)



Case Study #2

Interviewee #2 is an owner occupier with a large family who received two SMEAP calls. The first was following installation of solar PV through HUGS. The second was following installation of an ASHP and battery, which were funded through WH:LG. It is unclear whether he had already been referred to WH:LG for a battery at the time of the first SMEAP call. The client's priorities were to go greener – particularly by getting rid of their oil tank – as well as saving money and increasing comfort and convenience for his family.

The first advice call and report focussed on how to make the most of the client's newly installed solar PV. He was offered advice about staggering usage and signing up to a SEG tariff, which the client wasn't aware needed to be applied for. The advisor also discussed future retrofit options such as an ASHP, battery and EV. The second advice call and report focussed on how to use the newly installed ASHP, which the client had been operating like a conventional boiler. Advice was also provided on suitable import and export tariffs.

In his follow-up survey, the client reported that he was highly satisfied with his SMEAP experience, had already taken action on two recommendations, and was planning to take action on several more within the next 12 months. He indicated that the information provided was new to him, and he felt that it would not have been possible to obtain this advice anywhere else.

In his interview, the client noted positive changes in his awareness regarding the energy usage of various household appliances. He also reported behavioural changes such as energy monitoring and flexing their usage to make the most of the new solar generation. In addition, the client reported having had a positive experience with the new ASHP in terms of both space and water heating – potentially reflecting the behavioural advice he had received through the SMEAP on correct operation of a heat pump.

"I began to track how much energy is coming in, ... how hungry different appliances are, so I could get as much out of the solar panels as possible." (Interviewee #2)



Case Study #3

Interviewee #8 is an owner occupier who lives with her partner. The home they purchased came with solar PV panels, and the couple receives FIT payments. The client called CSE for energy advice and was then referred for a SMEAP call. Her key priority was to understand better how to make the most of their solar generation, both in terms of in-home consumption and through an export tariff. She had recently noticed a significant drop in their FIT payments as well as a reduction in the amount of electricity that the solar panels were generating – down to just 10% of what it was the previous summer.

The SMEAP advice call and report addressed the client's concerns regarding her solar output. The client had already had the solar panels cleaned, but this had not resolved the issue. As the inverter was over 10 years old, the advisor recommended contacting the original installer to see if it needed replacing. The advisor also suggested switching to a SEG tariff, which had the potential to increase their payments by 10p/kWh. Opportunities for taking part in demand shifting through the DFS or time of use tariffs were also discussed.

In her follow-up survey, the client reported that she was highly satisfied with her SMEAP experience and had already taken action regarding her solar panels. She agreed that her knowledge and confidence regarding her smart energy options had increased as a result of receiving the advice.

In her interview, the client reported that she had managed to get the faulty inverter fixed and that their export payments had since gone up. She stressed the importance of the SMEAP advice in getting this issue resolved, saying that she had previously "had no clue that it might've been the inverter." Despite reporting a similar positive impact in terms of increasing her awareness of export tariff options, the client had found it more challenging to act on the recommendation to switch to a SEG tariff. She felt that websites detailing export tariffs were full of jargon she didn't understand, which she cited as a barrier to taking action.

"We knew nothing about solar energy ... so your people really helped in terms of a basic understanding." (Interviewee #8)



Other impacts of receiving a SMEAP

Reassurance about choices

Three interviewees credited the SMEAP process with providing reassurance that they were making – or had previously made – the right decisions in terms of retrofitting their home:

"I felt reassured that it was going to be the right thing." (Interviewee #5)

"They confirmed my thinking and reassured me. ... I wanted reassurance that we were going down the right road." (Interviewee #7)

"You've reassured me ... that we were doing the right thing." (Interviewee #3)

Not only was such reassurance beneficial psychologically but, in some cases, it provided clients with the confidence to proceed with their retrofit – it enabled them to take action:

"Actually seeing it down in black and white and say 'Yes, you can do this and this is what you can expect', it makes you feel it's more doable and so less daunting. ... It confirmed that it was a doable and a sensible option." (Interviewee #4)

Understanding technologies

Several interviewees said that they came away from the SMEAP process with a better understanding of how technologies in their home work:

"I didn't really understand. You know, for me as a lay person, there's a lot of information out there. So he was able to explain to me how they [batteries] work and the benefits." (Interviewee #1)

"Having the work done has had a big impact on how we think about our energy use and understanding of the different systems and how they work." (Interviewee #2)

For Interviewee #8, the increased understanding of the solar PV she inherited when purchasing her house was particularly impactful. Through the advice, she learnt that solar panels need servicing, about the role of the inverter, and options regarding export tariffs:

"We knew nothing about solar energy ... so your people really helped in terms of a basic understanding." (Interviewee #8)



Other impacts of receiving a SMEAP

Cost savings

Another interviewee reported a substantial financial impact from replacing her faulty inverter:

"We were losing a lot of money compared to when we had moved in. And he told us it was likely to be the inverter. ... We got it changed and we've been making a lot more since." (Interviewee #8)

Comfort and convenience

Three interviewees talked about the increased comfort and convenience of their home energy setup following their advice.

Interviewee #1 commented on improved thermal comfort after her heat pump was reprogrammed by a SMEAP advisor during a home visit. The installer had set a relatively high target temperature on the heat pump, resulting in a home that felt too hot and dry for the client:

"I don't want my house at t-shirt temperature because I find it too hot. ... He set that up for me, which of course is very helpful." (Interviewee #1)



Barriers to following advice

Tariff information

Interviewees #2 and #5 seemed unclear about their tariff options despite these having been covered in their SMEAP. Interviewee #8 also found it challenging to explore export tariffs following her advice. She said that the websites were full of 'jargon' she didn't understand and there seemed to be an expectation that readers would be familiar with these terms:

"I don't remember it being that simple when I looked into the comparison sites . . . I remember thinking, 'Oh that's a lot' and 'I'll come back to it another time'." (Interviewee #8)

Leasehold agreements

Interviewee #6 commented that recommended actions relating to flexing her electricity usage were unhelpful given that she lives in a poorly soundproofed flat and is prohibited from making noise after 9pm. This means that she can't, for example, use her washing machine at night.

"So that wasn't really helpful to me in the situation that I'm in." (Interviewee #6)

Understanding controls

Interviewee #6, who described herself as a 'technophobe', decided against installing smart storage heaters as she was concerned about not having sufficient control over them. Despite having previously owned storage heaters in the past, she seemed unhappy with the thought of the storage heaters charging for long periods overnight and feared that this would result in an apartment that was too hot:

"It was all very technical, and it didn't look as though I had much choice other than have this heating on all night. And I very rarely need that much heating on." (Interviewee #6)

Cost and payback periods

The cost and potentially long payback period of retrofitting certain electrical assets was cited as a barrier by several clients. Interviewees #3 and #5 both decided against purchasing a battery as they felt it would take them too long to recoup the costs.



Enablers to following advice

Grants

In line with the observation noted above that costs were sometimes a barrier to retrofit, three interviewees mentioned that grants had enabled them to install measures such as solar PV and heat pumps.

For Interviewees #1 and #3, this retrofit took place prior to receiving a SMEAP. For Interviewee #5, the retrofit took place following receiving advice, but they had received the retrofit referral before their SMEAP advice.

Role of installers

Installers were also presented as potentially playing an important role in enabling a straightforward retrofit experience:

"Once we got the ideas from the plan and then talking to [the installer], it was just a case of [my son] said to them, yes, do this, this, this, booked it all in and then we just sat back and waited. It was so simple. It was ridiculously simple." (Interviewee #4)



Feedback on SMEAP process

High satisfaction levels with advice provided

Interviewees were generally highly satisfied with the SMEAP advice they received:

"I just found the whole process very helpful." (Interviewee #1)

In particular, the impartiality, accuracy and up-to-date nature of the advice was praised:

"What I appreciated was that there wasn't any, I didn't get that commercial sense ... that it was commercially motivated." (Interviewee #2)

"It was friendly advice. And it's the accuracy. ... Because things are changing so fast in this market, I think it had to be up to date, which I felt sure that your discussion was." (Interviewee #7)

Almost all interviewees said that they valued their SMEAP, even if in some cases they were already aware of the advice received. This related particularly to behavioural advice around energy monitoring, energy efficiency measures, and maximising the potential of solar PV.

Home visits particularly valued

The interviewee who received a home visit as part of their SMEAP advice was particularly pleased with this part of the service:

"I was really thrilled to have a home visit." (Interviewee #1)

Other interviewees who had received their advice via a phone call indicated that a home visit would have been beneficial; both these interviewees had their homes retrofitted and had existing solar PV arrays, which may explain why they felt being physically on site might have helped.



Feedback on SMEAP process

Report is simple and straightforward

In terms of the report format, one interviewee praised the simplicity and user-friendliness of the document:

"Very easy. Quite straightforward." (Interviewee #2)

Two other participants were also satisfied with how the information was presented, although they indicated that this may be a reflection of their literacy levels and familiarity with technical content:

"I can't remember anything which was less easily processed than anything else, but then we're used to looking at fairly techie documents." (Interviewee #4)

"I'm used to reading and you know, skim reading and so it's no problem for me, but for other people it might be..." (Interviewee #5)

All would recommend a SMEAP to others

All those interviewed said that they would recommend having a SMEAP to at least some types of people. Some felt that there was broad applicability of the advice:

"Yes, would be useful for anyone." (Interviewee #7)

Others who had undertaken extensive retrofit were more inclined to suggest that SMEAPs were most appropriate for homeowners considering similar major works:

"I would even go so far as to say it was probably essential if you're interested in [solar] sort of things, certainly. But even if you're not. Perhaps it could be something that was given to all new homeowners or something like that." (Interviewee #4)

"I wouldn't be a huge advocate that everyone needs to do it, but I think I would definitely point people in the direction if they were thinking about ... having some energy sustainable improvements made to their property." (Interviewee #2)



Suggested improvements

Some interviewees suggested improvements to the SMEAP process.

Help clients keep track of organisations

Two interviewees said that it was difficult to keep track of the various organisations that they dealt with throughout the retrofit process.

"The number of different players involved can get a bit confusing. ... I've lost track of who is which organisation." (Interviewee #2)

"I'm not sure which bit is the Smart Energy Action Plan. ... I'm quite confused with who was who. ... There's a lot of a lot of different organisation names, isn't there?" (Interviewee #5)

Interviewee #2 suggested it would be helpful for clients to be provided with a list of the organisations that they would be dealing with, including an explanation of their roles.

Neither interviewee had received an onward referral following a SMEAP. Interviewee #2 had previously been referred via Somerset HUGS (for solar) and Somerset WH:LG (for ASHP and battery). Interviewee #5 had been referred via Bristol City Leap HUGS (for solar). So, this shouldn't be seen as a direct weakness of SMEAP advice, but might be something that SMEAP advisors could help with in future.

Ensure clients are reading their report

Interviewees tended to place more weight on the importance of the advice they received through phone calls and home visits than the written follow-up report.

Two interviewees expressed uncertainty about whether they had received their report via email. As a potential solution, Interviewee #8 suggested that sending a follow-up email would provide a way of checking that clients have received their report and might also prompt them to ask questions about their plan.

Enhance report with graphics

One interviewee suggested that breaking up the text with images and other graphical elements might enhance the document's accessibility:

"It's quite a lot of block text, whereas something more graphical would probably be better." (Interviewee #2)



Conclusions



What went well?

High satisfaction levels across all measures

Both survey and interview feedback shows that a range of clients continue to have good experiences receiving SMEAP advice.

Overall satisfaction levels from the survey remain high, with 94% of clients agreeing they were satisfied with their experience. Although satisfaction levels are down from 100% in last year's evaluation, this may reflect the much larger sample size in the most recent surveys.

High satisfaction levels were also reflected in interviews, in which all interviewees were positive about their advice experience (note, however, that it was not possible to interview any clients who have expressed low satisfaction levels in the survey).

Valuable advice delivered well

SMEAP advice was praised for its impartiality and trustworthiness; this was particularly valued by interviewees who had previously dealt with companies trying to pressure them into buying energy products.

The advice was also characterised as comprehensive, the right level of detail (93% agreed) and easy to understand (90% agreed). SMEAP advisors were commended for being friendly, helpful and patient.

Interviews revealed that clients who received a home visit were particularly positive about their advice experience.

A unique energy advice offering

There is strong evidence that SMEAPs continue to be a unique offering within the broader UK energy advice landscape: 74% of survey respondents said didn't feel they could have obtained their advice anywhere else.

89% of respondents who believed that they could have received the information elsewhere were still satisfied with their SMEAP advice.



What went well?

Increased knowledge of smart offers

Many clients across both the surveys and interviews reported that a significant impact of receiving a SMEAP was greater awareness of the smart energy market.

93% of survey respondents reported having more knowledge of their smart energy options.

This finding was echoed by interviewees who said it was valuable to find out what was available to them as well as reporting the benefits of learning more about the operation of their existing smart tech.

Confidence and validation

Alongside increased knowledge and awareness, another important impact of receiving a SMEAP was increased confidence in being able to engage with smart energy.

74% of survey respondents reported an increase in their confidence following the advice. The interviews shed more light on this finding and revealed that while some clients were already knowledgeable about their options, there was a strong need for reassurance and validation of their choices from a trusted source.



What went well?

Action and intention in relation to some recommended smart offers

A high proportion (75%) of survey respondents said that they are planning on taking up at least one of their recommendations in the future, suggesting the relevance of recommendations made. Other survey and interview evidence reflects this finding, with several clients reporting having already taken up (or intentions to take up) a range of recommended offers.

Survey evidence that 8/10 clients recommended solar PV reported taking it up is likely inaccurate – reflecting pre-SMEAP installations and PV-related behaviour change. But there was survey evidence of several clients taking up low or no-cost offers such as smart heating controls and demand shifting schemes. Increased reported take up of static time-of use tariffs may reflect new options that have come to the market in the last year. Interviewees confirmed they had taken up some more expensive smart products, as well as a smart tariff.

Flexing a relatively common action – especially for PV owners

Experimenting with flexing usage and getting usage aware were the recommended actions that the highest proportion of survey respondents reported either actioning already, or intending to action in the next year.

This finding likely partially reflects the high proportion of clients advised on solar PV. Indeed, the interviews revealed that several clients with solar PV had become more aware of how to maximise use of their solar generation, including through flexing their usage and increasing their understanding of the electricity demand of various appliances.

Recommended actions and offers leading to material benefits for clients

Survey and interviews revealed that taking up recommended actions and offers had led to some material benefits for interviewees: energy cost savings, self-sufficiency, and increased comfort and convenience.



What worked less well?

Slightly lower novelty and uniqueness scores

Clients were slightly less likely than last year to report that SMEAP advice information was new to them and that they couldn't have received their advice from elsewhere. This development may partly reflect recent growth in smart energy awareness and advice sources. In any case, it didn't negatively impact on overall satisfaction for these clients. This might reflect the value of SMEAP advice validating people's existing knowledge or opinions.

Some challenges in communicating tariff information

A small number of clients seemed to struggle with the advice they were given on tariffs. One interviewee complained that his SMEAP didn't contain sufficient information on tariffs, despite his report showing that several tariff options had been provided. Another interviewee reported difficulty with navigating the tariff options available to her.

The survey revealed some additional challenges with communicating tariff information. One respondent felt their advice on some tariffs was out of date, while another respondent flagged that more information on potential tariff savings could have been useful.

A lack of some follow-up support

Surveys and interviews both highlighted some challenges with a lack of 'aftercare' following their advice calls. Two interviewees flagged that they found it confusing to know who was who in their referral chain when getting LCTs installed (although these installations weren't a direct result of SMEAP calls). Similarly, clients in the survey wanted more contact information about who they were speaking to at different stages of the referral journey.

Survey respondents also felt that more follow-ups could have been useful to help bed-in new technologies or consolidate new information.

Limited evidence of written material impact

Some interviewees felt that written advice resources could be improved through, for example, more visual content. Others reflected that, although they found them useful, others might find their technicality overwhelming. Generally, there was a lack of clear evidence about the value of written reports. Some interviewees seemed like they hadn't received them, and most of the positive comments about advice focussed on advice calls.



What worked less well?

Low interviewee take up of recommended smart tariffs

The proportion of clients reporting taking up offers was broadly comparable to the last evaluation: both in the survey and in interviews.

Nonetheless, interview evidence did suggest there was low-take up of recommended tariffs. 6/8 interviewees were recommended some kind of smart tariff. However, only 1 in 6 of these clients reported later taking up a recommended tariff. This may reflect some of the difficulties in advising on tariffs mentioned on the previous slide. Partly as a result of inaction on tariffs, five interviewees did not take up any of their recommended actions.

This being said, this evidence should be tempered with a couple of points:

- Several of these interviewees *did* report taking up recommended actions around flexing their usage, and that these actions were impactful.
- Not taking up recommended offers does not reflect a bad SMEAP experience. All interviewees were happy with their SMEAP advice, and some saw value in having investment decisions validated.

Challenges of showing impact for non-LCT clients

There continues to be limited concrete evidence of impact for SMEAP clients without, or not looking to install, LCTs like PV. Although some clients reported taking up non-LCT offers, these numbers were still relatively small. And although more clients this year reported experimented with flexing and getting to know their usage, likely a decent proportion of these were clients with solar PV. Other supporting actions received little mention around client intentions.

This is partly a methodological issue. Despite our sampling attempts, 7/8 interviewees fell into the group above. There were therefore fewer clients to speak to about non LCT-related SMEAP impacts, creating a bias here. Generally, the surveys and interviews reflect (as in previous years) that clients also find it easier to talk about changes relating to new smart offers compared to the supporting actions that may be more common for clients without LCTs or missing certain smart energy capabilities.

This pattern also reflects a continuing lack of market options for those without LCTs. Although this year saw an uptick in client actions around static time-of-use tariffs (maybe reflecting new market arrivals in this space), there are still comparatively few offerings for non-LCT clients that meet key motivations for most clients: saving money and going greener.



Recommendations

Consider more follow-up support

Evidence suggests some clients would find more hand-holding following their advice call helpful.

This could take the form of a check-in phase several weeks or months after the call (if the client reported a desire for this). This could be used to follow up on progress, nudge clients to review their report, or discuss barriers encountered in attempting to action recommendations.

For clients referred inward or onward, more information on organisations involved could be useful. This could be a new section to the report that contains a list of all organisations mentioned and/or referred to, to avoid confusion and communication issues. This could include organisations' full names, contact details, and a short summary about the organisation so the client is clear on who they are going to and for what. The advisor's contact details should also be provided here so the client can get back in touch if needed, ensuring that this is with the relevant and informed advisor.

Tweak the format of advice

Positive feedback on home visits suggests these are an effective way of delivering smart energy advice. Visits should be continued and ramped up where funding and capacity allows.

Consider simplifying particularly long reports or making them more accessible and appealing by incorporating graphics and other visual elements. This may reduce overwhelm and increase the likelihood of clients revisiting their report after the advice call.

A review of the general structure of reports should also be carried out given that there is currently a high degree of variation. An optimal structure that provides greatest ease of navigation for clients should be devised as a template for all reports.

A specific review of tariff advice (both live and in-reports) may also be useful. This could include simplifying information provided wherever possible, as well as providing any available information on estimated cost savings (such as that being currently worked on by the CSE Research team). More broadly, advisors should continue to liaise closely with the Research team to ensure information in this rapidly-changing area is as up-to-date as possible.



Recommendations

Targeting and evidencing impact for non-LCT clients

Although the challenges around achieving impact for non-LCT clients are partly dependent on new market offerings, some steps could be tried to explore potential for change:

Changes to advice provision mentioned on the previous slide (such as more visual reports) may help to engage these clients more after their advice call. Greater emphasis on a smaller selection of actions or low-cost offers, as well as smart-meter mythbusting, may also be useful for this group. Ensuring tariff information is as up-to-date as possible will also maximise potential impact for LCT clients.

More targeted evaluation of non-LCT clients could also be useful. At the least, this should include ensuring enough time is built into evaluation schedules to drive enough interview participation from non-LCT clients. But evaluation could also be tailored through a focus on certain clients and actions/offers (e.g. clients (like Interviewee #6) with storage heaters). Grants could also be provided for specific clients for smaller enabling products to evaluate the impact of these.

Update evaluation methodologies

Some changes to the evaluation process may make evidencing impact more accurate in future:

- The motivations questions could be changed to make results more meaningful and granular for the most common SMEAP client pathways: like advice on using solar PV efficiently.
- Distinguishing between recommendations relating to optimising usage of heat pumps/PV and recommending these as offers may provide greater accuracy in recording advice impacts.
- Changes mentioned on the left-hand side to find out more about SMEAP impacts for non-LCT clients.
- Ensuring greater researcher clarity on client advice history – for example, understanding changes made in advance/separate from SMEAP advice – before conducting interviews/analysis.
- Finally, survey figures were much higher this year compared to the previous year. This was due to chasing clients and completing the survey with them over the phone, which they were usually responsive to. Maintain this approach for future evaluations.



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