

# Fury at government plan to abolish DEC's

## ● Changes would enable 'public sector bodies to hide their wastefulness'

The industry has reacted furiously to the government's proposal to abolish Display Energy Certificates (DECs) for 54,000 public buildings in England and Wales.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has started a consultation process aimed at 'removing the legal requirement' for DECs, to help 'streamline and improve' the current system. It added that scrapping DECs would be 'in line with government policy not to gold-plate European Union directives – ie, not to go further than the minimum requirements'.

'The objective is to simplify the regulatory regime as it applies to public buildings, taking appropriate advantage of the flexibilities afforded by the directive, while continuing to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and minimising unnecessary burdens upon the public purse and, ultimately, the taxpayer,' the consultation document states.

However, CIBSE technical director, Hywel Davies, said the proposal demonstrated 'bizarre' double standards. 'At the same time as the government is proposing these changes, it is requiring the private sector to provide accurate metering data for billing,' he said. 'It seems bizarre for the Department for Business

Innovation and Skills to introduce these regulations, while DCLG is trying to enable energy-profligate public sector bodies to hide their wastefulness.'

Davies added: 'There is no evidence base to justify these changes, and it is very likely that it will be far more expensive to respond to Freedom of Information requests for the information currently in DECs, than to maintain and take advantage of the DECs.'

Public buildings of more than 1,000m<sup>2</sup> have had to have a DEC since 2008. Buildings

of more than 500m<sup>2</sup>, but below 1,000m<sup>2</sup>, have to have one every 10 years and, in 2011, the government said it would extend this requirement to all commercial buildings. David Frise, head of sustainability at the Building and Engineering Services Association, said the U-turn was 'political point scoring' ahead of the General Election.

DCLG has said it is aware of concerns that reducing the frequency or reach of DECs could make it more difficult to manage energy performance of large public estates.

## THE HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF ENERGY POLICY by Bill Bordass



On 14 February, David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband signed a joint climate pledge that included a commitment 'to accelerate the transition to a competitive, energy-efficient low carbon economy'. How do you know if a building is energy efficient? By making its in-use performance visible and actionable. Which policy instrument helps to do this? DECs. They have revealed major performance gaps between expectations and outcomes, but massive potential for cost-effective improvement, as seen at the Department of Energy and Climate Change's Westminster HQ, and DCLG's offices in Birmingham.

So shouldn't buildings and energy policy converge to get a good DEC and then improve it – for public and commercial structures? The 2011 Energy Bill, supported by the UK Green Building Council and others, proposed this. Incredibly, the Treasury removed the clause, regarding DECs as red tape.

DECs can be cheap and easy to do, but – having failed to support them properly – DCLG now wants to abandon them, dismissing what ought to be the focal point of energy policy as 'gold plating' of an EU directive. What planet are they on? Certainly not the low carbon one to which our party leaders gave their pledge.