

Don't Let Davey's Work be in Vain

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This column appeared in the July/August 2015 issue of Energy in Buildings & Industry. Andrew Warren examines how one of the proudest new initiatives of 2010/15 Ministers in the Department of Energy and Climate Change was deliberately scrapped by perennially hostile civil servants, even before the new Government took office.

This is a tale of how a key political initiative collapsed, from being the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change's "number one priority" in 2012, to being surreptitiously dismantled by civil servants - even before he had formally left office.

On his first day as Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Secretary of State, Ed Davey launched the Energy Efficiency Deployment Office. Even as the 2010/5 Parliament ended, and Davey took off to try (unsuccessfully) to retain his marginal consistency, the mandarins at DECC simply dissolved the EEDO- without making any public announcement.

Subsequently there have been various disingenuous attempts to explain this away as simply an internal reorganization, essentially a managerial rather than a political decision.

Disingenuous because they airily brush aside not just the major struggle that Davey, his predecessor Chris Huhne and his Conservative Minister of State, Greg Barker, had with the civil service mandarins to get the Office created in the first place. They ignore the impact of not just the high profile launch of EEDO, but also the famous Royal Society event at which as Prime Minister, David Cameron launched the EEDO strategy.

Recognising energy efficiency

As Barker explained, when speaking at that Royal Society event: "one of the first things that I did coming into government was to ensure that energy efficiency was actually properly recognised in the architecture of the Department of Energy & Climate Change.

"It was extraordinary to me to get there and find that we had an Office for the Deployment of Renewables; that there was an Office for New Nuclear; that there is obviously a big oil and gas office there.

"But energy efficiency was dispersed piecemeal throughout the Department; and there was nobody actually at the top table speaking up for energy efficiency alongside the other key elements of energy policy and the energy future.

The then energy minister concluded: “Now we have the Energy Efficiency Deployment Office, at last recognised within DECC as a vital part of our future policy framework.”

Its creation was held by all energy ministers as one of the proud achievements of the 2010/15 Government, an achievement confirmed by the fact that the Prime Minister was prepared to directly involve himself with the launch of its formal Energy Efficiency Strategy. With promises of annual updates on progress (of which only the 2013 version ever appeared).

EEDO’s creation was certainly warmly welcomed throughout the energy efficiency industry. Inevitably there were some rumbles as to quite why the new Office spent quite so much of its resources commissioning research papers, many of which duplicated work which previous governments had paid for via their then agencies (the Building Research Establishment, Carbon Trust, Energy Saving Trust etc).

But there was a satisfaction that at last there was an entity within Government that was charged not with delivering individual programmes, like Green Deal or smart meter rollout. But with considering how, as Ed Davey’s Foreword for that initial Strategy document stressed, implementing cost-effective energy savings could eliminate the need for 22 new power stations.

Purposeful policies

Three years on DECC continues to have (as Greg Barker pointed out) Deployment Offices intended to spearhead purposeful policies which promote renewables, which promote new nuclear, which promote unconventional oil and gas - plus one promoting the ever-elusive Carbon Capture and Storage.

But his successors came into the Department to find no unit which considers the potential of the demand side of the energy equation. Instead they were urged to find 60% of the Departmental budget savings required by the Chancellor during the present financial year , out of the miserly 2% of its budget that DECC has spent on energy efficiency.

What new Ministers will have found is a Department apparently determined to return to its historic origins as the Department of Energy Supply. After all, this was a Department upon the walls of which could be found until very recently the slogan: “Real Men Build Power Stations.” A pernicious philosophy which 2010/15 ministers worked so hard to overcome. It must not have been in vain.

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