

# **Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee - Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan: 2026-40 - call for views**

## **Response from Energy Saving Trust**

**9 December 2025**

### **1. Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee ahead of its evidence session on *“what is needed in terms of people’s access to advice and support in retrofitting and decarbonising their homes and whether there are sufficient construction training and skills to deliver the ambitions of the plan”* on Tuesday 16 December 2025.

Energy Saving Trust delivers Home Energy Scotland and the Green Heat Installer Engagement Programme on behalf of the Scottish Government. These programmes focus on advice and support for householders and on building skills and capacity in the supply chain respectively and are therefore likely to be of interest to the Committee. Our response therefore begins by outlining these programmes before setting out our views on what is needed in terms of people’s access to advice and support in retrofitting and decarbonising their homes and whether there are sufficient construction training and skills to deliver the ambitions of the plan.

### **2. Relevant programmes delivered by Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the Scottish Government**

#### **Home Energy Scotland**

In Scotland, householders and smaller private landlords can access free, independent, personalised and impartial advice from the Home Energy Scotland service, delivered by Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the Scottish Government. Advice is provided through multiple channels, including by phone and email, face-to-face in the home and through local outreach (for example, MSP constituency office sessions staffed by Home Energy Scotland advisors and advice stalls in hospital settings). Online support is also available, consisting of bespoke advice through social media channels including WhatsApp, a dedicated website and online tools, managed and provided centrally by Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the Scottish Government. The “Green Homes Network”, a library of case studies of exemplar low energy/carbon homes, reinforces these advice channels, allowing householders to browse case studies online and, if they wish, arrange visits to nearby example properties or contact homeowners directly to ask practical questions.

There are five regional Home Energy Scotland advice centres together with a central out of hours service handling enquiries in the evenings and at weekends. This locally managed approach means that the advice provided to householders can be better tailored to reflect local circumstances (e.g. housing types, the installer base, the support available from local authorities and other local organisations, etc).

Each year, Home Energy Scotland helps more than 95,000 customers across Scotland, consistently achieving excellent customer experience scores and

delivering significant carbon and financial savings. Evaluation shows that advice leads directly to action: 42% of customers install at least one energy efficiency or low-carbon improvement after receiving advice, and 42% plan to do so within 12 months.

This advice also provides a significant return on investment, with every £1 spent on providing expert, tailored advice returns almost £15 in lifetime savings for households.

More detailed information about Home Energy Scotland is available in our [Scotland report](#). An updated version of this report should be available early in the new year and we would be happy to provide you with a copy.

### **The Green Heat Installer Engagement Programme**

The Green Heat Installer Engagement Programme provides assistance and support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local suppliers to access the growing clean heat market. It does this in a variety of ways such as delivering webinars and attending events across Scotland to share updates on policy, funding, clean heat technologies, and upskilling opportunities in areas such as heat pumps, heat networks and energy efficiency. The programme administers targeted grants, including:

- The Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) grant for heat pumps, which provides heating engineers with a grant to help them become MCS certified (75%, up to £1,000, of their certification fees).
- The Heat Pumps Skills fund provides grants for heat pump training, prioritising remote and rural areas of Scotland via the mobile heat pump training assessment unit.

## **3. Our views on advice and support for households**

### **Why advice matters for Scotland's climate change targets**

We very much support the Scottish Government's intention outlined in the draft Climate Change Plan to continue delivering a programme of support schemes and advice services that help a wide range of groups to decarbonise heat in buildings, including through the Home Energy Scotland Advice Service.

Meeting Scotland's climate targets will require a transformation in how we heat and insulate our homes. The CCC recommends that:

- 40% of existing homes should be using low-carbon electric heating - primarily heat pumps - rising to 92% by 2045.
- Annual heat pump installations should reach nearly 35,000 by 2030 - in comparison, 7,660 MCS-certified heat pumps were installed in Scotland in 2023/24.

- Alongside this, improving energy efficiency is expected to contribute 14% of the emissions needed by 2035.

To make informed decisions about improving the energy performance of their homes, people need access to trusted advice. The Scottish Government's Home Energy Scotland advice service plays a central role in meeting this need, offering free, impartial advice to consumers on fuel poverty, energy and carbon-saving which is tailored to their individual circumstances. Its advice aims to facilitate informed choices by removing technical jargon, making home improvements simple to understand, changing the buying and usage behaviours of householders and referring them to financial support schemes that best meet their needs. As demand for energy efficiency and clean heating grows, it will be important to continue building on Home Energy Scotland's capacity to give households the confidence to make changes to their homes.

A key strength of the service is its role as a gateway to grants and loans. Home Energy Scotland is the sole referral route for the Home Energy Scotland Grant and Loan Scheme as well as to other available financial support (for example the Scottish Government's national fuel poverty programme Warmer Home Scotland). This ensures that, where eligible, customers can be referred to the most appropriate programme specific to their personal circumstances, which for loans includes ensuring that any repayments are affordable. It also helps to protect people from financial harm. On occasion, customers who have been approached by installers and call the service looking for grant and loan funding have been eligible for Warmer Homes Scotland, without this route to referral these customers could have accrued unnecessary debt. Having the Home Energy Scotland advice service as the sole referral route for the Home Energy Scotland Grant and Loan Scheme also ensures that the scheme is not mis-sold to customers. For these reasons we think that it is important that this function remains in place as part of the Home Energy Scotland service as we move into the period covered by Scotland's Climate Change Plan (2026-2040).

If Scotland's climate targets are to be met, advice services along with Home Energy Scotland will need to grow and adapt significantly to help households improve their homes at the necessary pace and scale. Home Energy Scotland already works at scale with a wide reach across different audiences and is constantly adapting digital offerings to support the need to scale up and provide more efficient routes to funding. This is a strong foundation to build on which offers customers trusted and safe advice along with clear routes to take action.

## **Key strengths of the existing service**

### **Impartiality**

We believe that it is essential that the Home Energy Scotland advice service remains impartial as we move into the period covered by Scotland's Climate Change Plan (2026-2040). Impartiality ensures that householders receive trusted, unbiased advice that helps give them a level of knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions, understand the options available to them and protects them from high pressure selling which might disadvantage them financially or may not be the best

option for their property. This impartial advice includes practical guidance on working with installers. For example, householders advised to:

- Seek at least three quotes from different installers to ensure good value for money and allow them to compare specifications.
- Ask their chosen installer if they are fully qualified and accredited with a relevant industry body or trade federation.
- Confirm which guarantees and warranties their chosen installer will provide for the products they install and for their workmanship.
- If installing a domestic energy storage system refer to the [Renewable Energy Consumer Code](#)'s (RECC) website for further guidance, including questions to ask their installer.

Householders are also advised that Home Energy Scotland never cold calls and that people can report any instances of cold calling to the Information Commissioner's Office.

To support informed choices, householders in Scotland can use the Renewables Installer Finder (RIF) Scotland tool, which lists Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installers and includes a review system where customers can share experiences. Recipients of grants or loans under the Home Energy Scotland Grant and Loan scheme are encouraged to leave reviews to help others. While there is no RIF equivalent for TrustMark-accredited installers, these can be found on the TrustMark website

By maintaining impartiality and offering tools like RIF, Home Energy Scotland helps householders avoid hard selling, compare options confidently and choose reputable installers.

#### Joined up support and partnerships

The advice landscape is most effective when services are joined up and easy to access, ensuring householders experience a smooth consumer journey. Home Energy Scotland provides a strong example of this approach. No single service can meet every need, so effective signposting and referrals to trusted partners - whether for benefits checks, crisis support or money advice - are essential to ensure households can access the full range of support available. This type of joined up approach is particularly important for those experiencing or at risk of fuel poverty, where multiple forms of support may be needed. In this context, Home Energy Scotland:

- Signposts to DWP for benefit checks or Citizens Advice Scotland for benefit check support.
- Helps ensure households are on the most efficient and effective tariff for their needs. For those who can switch themselves, Home Energy Scotland shows people where to access Ofgem approved switching platforms; those who

need support are signposted to partners' resources to see the range of tariffs and options available.

- Helps customers to access Warm Home Discount and refer customers for support from local agencies (e.g. Care and Repair), local in-home energy advice and advocacy services and for money advice.
- Helps refer customers to energy crisis support schemes where available.

Accessibility is another key strength of Home Energy Scotland. Many people who could benefit from advice do not actively seek it, so Home Energy Scotland works in partnership with organisations who are already supporting these individuals to ensure that those most in need are referred into advice services and receive the help they might otherwise miss out on. Home Energy Scotland works with trusted partner organisations including health and social care organisations, local authorities, charities, food banks etc to build referral pathways for vulnerable householders. During 2023-24, around 7% of all the unique households advised by Home Energy Scotland were referred from trusted partner organisations. These organisations can make seamless referrals using an online referral portal which works in real time to put householder's details directly into Home Energy Scotland's database for advisors to follow up

### **The ongoing evolution of the advice service**

Home Energy Scotland continually evolves to reflect a wide variety of changes - including those in policy and programmes, technology and the way people want to access advice and support.

The service is currently expanding digital self-service options, enabling it to increase its reach without significantly raising costs. This approach frees up advisor capacity to support those who cannot engage online, while also providing flexibility for those who are time poor by allowing them to access advice and support whenever and wherever it suits them.

Alongside these digital developments, the service is also evolving how it delivers advice on the ground. One example is the place-based approach to overcome barriers in rural and island communities which was originally piloted in Raasay.

The Isle of Raasay was chosen as part of Scotland's Carbon Neutral Islands project, where residents faced challenges such as high fuel costs, damp homes, and limited access to retrofit services due to contractor travel constraints. To address these issues, Home Energy Scotland's Highlands and Islands team partnered with Raasay Development Trust, combining local trust with technical expertise. This included sustained engagement and a concentrated programme of home visits, delivering in-depth, face-to-face advice to households that had often never accessed energy support before.

The Home Energy Scotland Highlands and Islands team's work on Raasay resulted in 42 Home Energy Improvement Reports - there are around 90 permanent households on Raasay so this represents a significant proportion of the full-time population. The team were also able to identify over 20 properties as being suitable

for a referral to the Highland Council Area Based Scheme, and over 12 as suitable for a Warmer Homes Scotland referral.

Highland Council contractors have started carrying out mass retrofit – social housing is included, enabling anyone who doesn't qualify for a grant to self-fund their own retrofit measures. As of October 2025, 50 measures have been installed across 12 households, which include air source heat pumps, solar PV, battery storage, and various types of insulation.

Working at community scale creates economies of scale for installers, making logistics and costs more manageable and enabling a wider range of measures — particularly insulation — to be delivered. It also builds momentum: homeowners are more likely to act when they see friends and neighbours making changes, and local anchor organisations help overcome mistrust and past negative experiences. Similar projects have since been replicated on other islands and remote communities, demonstrating that place-based delivery is a powerful tool for accelerating Scotland's transition to net zero. [Further information about the project can be found here.](#)

As well as adapting how advice is delivered - for example through digital tools and place-based approaches - the service also needs to continue to evolve the scope of advice provided. For example, as Scotland's climate changes and temperatures rise, the risk of overheating in homes will increase and so it will be important for advice services to anticipate these needs. Over time, this could include guidance on passive cooling measures like shading and ventilation to help households stay comfortable without increasing energy use or costs as well as active cooling. Ensuring advice keeps pace with emerging risks and opportunities will help avoid fragmented or inefficient solutions and support a smooth transition to clean heat. In this context, we support the Scottish Government's intention, as part of the new Heat in Buildings Strategy and Delivery Plan, to consider climate adaptation issues such as exploring how passive cooling measures could be applied during fabric improvements.

Other examples of areas where advice services may need to evolve include helping households take advantage of emerging opportunities such as the interaction of smart meters and flexible tariffs and how these interact with low carbon technologies, and responding to growing demand for retrofit in flats as policy and market conditions change.

## **Awareness raising**

Advice services are most effective when people are aware of them, know how to access them and trust the information they receive. Raising awareness is therefore critical to driving households towards impartial advice like Home Energy Scotland.

The Scottish Government already delivers a wide-ranging public engagement programme through initiatives such as Scotland's Climate Week and the Let's Do Net Zero Campaign, as well as other engagement and awareness activity. However, while most people are concerned about climate change, many do not understand what they can do to reduce their own impact. In addition, the UK public do not feel part of the transition, with a recent survey of UK homeowners finding that 48% of respondents felt that the net zero transition was happening to them and over a third felt they could not engage with it at all.

Across Great Britain, public knowledge of energy efficiency and low carbon technologies also remains low. Recent research found inaccurate beliefs and poor knowledge to be widespread amongst those surveyed. For example, 73% of British consumers surveyed stated they don't understand what a heat pump is and 57% believed home insulation doesn't work well in older homes. Misinformation and negative stories also contribute to scepticism and a lack of trust around low carbon technologies, acting as a barrier to action. Recent Consumer Scotland research highlights the value of clear, trusted information and better signposting to impartial sources like Home Energy Scotland to help consumers make confident decisions<sup>1</sup>.

To secure public buy-in and ensure the success of decarbonisation policies, it will be important to maintain and build on existing engagement activity. Public engagement helps create the conditions for policy delivery by building public understanding and support - both of which are essential for introducing the policies needed to drive action on the ground.

#### **4. Our views on training and skills to deliver the ambitions of the plan**

As noted above, meeting Scotland's climate change targets will require tens of thousands of low carbon heating and energy efficiency measures to be installed each year.

That means that there will need to be sufficient numbers of trained professionals to carry out these installations. This will require a significant increase in workforce capacity, particularly in remote and rural areas where access to skilled installers can be more limited. To support this, additional policies are required that support supply chain growth, including:

- **Provide policy certainty.** The Scottish Government should set out clear, long-term plans and funding commitments for retrofit programmes. This should include clarity on what measures will be needed, how much work is expected, when it will happen, and where - so that businesses can plan ahead and invest in workforce growth. Regulation will also be important to provide certainty for businesses (see above). At present, uncertainty about future demand is holding back supply chain investment.
- **Support streamlined upskilling and retraining.** Modern apprenticeships can take up to four years to complete, creating a time lag in delivering skilled workers. The Scottish Government should support faster training routes - such as conversion courses for people entering from other sectors - to help meet immediate demand.
- **Provide financial support for people reskilling.** Introduce financial assistance for individuals undertaking training or changing careers into the retrofit sector. This would help remove income barriers during the training period and encourage more people to enter the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> See: [Heat in Buildings - supporting the rollout of heat pumps and solar PV in Scotland \(HTML\)](#) | [Consumer Scotland](#)

- **Make it easier for young people to start careers in retrofit.** The Scottish Government should work with partners such as the Scottish College Network and SNIPeF to expand modern apprenticeship pathways in renewables. This will help young people gain the skills they need to access secure, long-term jobs in the retrofit sector.
- **Raise awareness and improve the sector's appeal.** The Scottish Government should launch targeted campaigns to raise awareness of retrofit careers, particularly among underrepresented groups such as women and ethnic minorities. A lack of visibility is currently limiting workforce growth.
- **Promote retrofit careers in schools.** Collaborate with careers services to raise awareness of retrofit as a career option among school pupils. Early engagement will help young people make informed choices and enter the sector through supported pathways.
- **Support SME installers to grow with local markets.** The Scottish Government should continue to provide tailored support to help local SME installers expand in response to growing demand - especially in rural areas. Programmes like the Scottish Government's Green Heat Installer Programme (GHIEP), which is delivered by Energy Saving Trust, already play an important role in this space and should be built upon.
- **Support small businesses to take on apprentices.** The Scottish Government should provide targeted financial assistance to help small and micro businesses cover the costs of employing apprentices. Many small firms – particularly in rural areas – are currently unable to afford the costs of taking on new apprentices. Supporting these businesses to take on apprentices would help grow the skilled workforce in the medium term and ensure that retrofit jobs are distributed across Scotland's communities.