

# **Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee**

## **Report on heat in buildings – online lived experience event**

**18 November 2025**

### **Background**

To support the Committee's scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft Climate Change Plan – in particular the 'buildings' element of the plan – on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025 members of the Committee held a private online discussion with two groups of people who have experience of retrofitting and decarbonising their homes, and people who have attempted to do so.

Contributors were recruited to the session by Changeworks and the Gallant project at the University of Glasgow, and staff members from both organisations joined the discussions.

This report provides a summary of the key points that people raised in each group.

### **Group 1: people with limited experience of retrofitting**

The key question discussed by the group was what their experiences have been of trying to make their homes more energy efficient, which are themed below under some main headings.

#### **Poor quality housing**

- Some people are experiencing homes that are damp, mouldy and draughty, and need fixing before any retrofitting can make a difference.
- At times social housing providers are installing new kitchens and bathrooms but not including window replacement in upgrades, so properties remain drafty and cold.
- Use of pre-paid meters in social housing makes heating very expensive.

#### **Advice**

- Finding sources of advice can be difficult or confusing, and means that people reach a dead-end quickly in trying to retrofit their homes.
- There were mixed views on the services provided by Home Energy Scotland.
- Information can be conflicting, and people are unsure if sources are reliable.
- There is a lot of complex information available, and concerns about possible unintended negative consequences can prevent people taking action.

- Many people don't have internet or smart phones and are at a disadvantage in accessing information – they need direct contact from the Government, for example on the grants available.
- Social housing providers need to put things in place to help people, for example neurodivergent or elderly people might struggle to understand, or there may be language barriers.
- The main housing associations in Govan for example has an energy adviser available, but that advice is mainly about bills, and not retrofitting.

### **Tradespeople**

- People expressed mistrust of tradespeople and concerns about 'cowboys' after previous bad experiences – people can be vulnerable and need protecting.
- It's very difficult to find people to do small jobs such as repairs, which then prevents improvements/retrofitting.
- Any retrofitting work gets charged VAT, but if was a self-build would be exempt – this can be a disincentive.
- There are additional challenges in more rural areas, with fewer tradespeople and increased costs.
- There needs to be investment in training programmes, and people encouraged to get into trades as a career, especially electricians.

### **Technology and grants**

- There are challenges in getting grants – an example was provided of someone installing underfloor insulation themselves and afterwards finding out there may have been funding available for that.
- Currently there's no grant support in Scotland for 'air to air' heat pumps, which aren't commonly used in UK. At the it's moment expensive and not supported, but good for flats.
- District heating has been the 'future of heating' for about 40 years.

### **Tenements**

- There are particular challenges facing tenement buildings and the need for collective decisions/agreements to be reached.

### **Use of renewables**

- People expressed frustration that large-scale renewables projects like wind turbines are visible from Glasgow but local communities don't benefit from them, with electricity prices remaining high.

- Opportunities for greater use of a wide range of heat sources – examples of innovation like the venue SWG3 which uses a renewable heating and cooling system using body heat from audiences.
- Could the shared spaces behind tenements be utilised?
- Most people replace boilers in emergency situations, for example in winter when they break down. There needs to be a way to allow for retrospective applications for heat pump grants, so that if needed people can get them installed urgently (for example an installer could issue an emergency replacement notice).

### **What role should councils play?**

- Some councils are providing services through other organisations, for example South Lanarkshire who uses Eco-cosi to be a 'one-stop-shop'. Part of that service is to identify vetted installers and make checks, although still challenging to find enough tradespeople.

## **Group 2: people with experience of retrofitting their homes**

**Part 1.** The second group also focused their discussions around their own experiences of retrofitting. Their discussions are summarised below.

### **Advice**

People found it difficult to access advice.

- People reported asking architects and EPC assessors for advice.
- Some reported that it was only when they came across an agency who would take them through each step of the way and make recommendations (rather than just information) that they began to make progress.
- Others felt advice and support agencies could also have done more to guide them through the process.
- The other side of this was those representing social enterprises and charities saying that it is hard to compete with Home Energy Scotland, despite their limitations, because they are a free service. More private finance in the advice sector was suggested.

The importance of the independence of advice received was noted.

- People found that when they asked installers for advice, they recommended their specialism or area they were qualified to install, rather than what was best for the home.
- Some found that installers would recommend very expensive solutions which were not actually required (for example, a larger heat pump than would be needed for the size of the property just based on the size of the house). They

needed an agency to translate the requirements of their home into the exact practical steps needed.

#### Proactive

- People found recommendations of which installers to use helpful.

#### Home Energy Scotland

- The advice was not thought to be of the standard people required.
- People found the Home Energy Scotland (HES) advice and support hard to navigate.
- There were several comments about pre-existing motivations of the group of participants - people who had already undertaken retrofit activity. It was noted that if motivated individuals find it hard to engage with HES advice, then how were those who were not engaged going to accomplish decarbonisation of their home. It was suggested advice needed to be available to homeowners and landlords

#### Funding

People reported the process of applying for grants was not easy – words like painful and traumatic were used to describe it.

- Interactions with the Energy Savings Trust on funding were described as problematic and a barrier to people being able to make required changes.

Some forms of insulation are eligible for grants and some are not.

- People reported coming across challenges depending on the age and character of their building. Examples included old tenements, various types of roofing etc.
- Why can funding not be available for “insulation” as a whole?

#### Renovation projects

- People reported undertaking retrofitting activities when renovating properties but needed to access the grants for those activities because they were already spending significant amounts on the other parts of the project.
- A total of £7.5k is available, not for each type of energy efficiency or decarbonisation solution you could implement.
- Caveats were placed on funding which were acting as a barrier (for example, the requirement for 100% of heating to be delivered by a heat pump in order to be eligible for the grant). A more nuanced approach was suggested.

## Private finance

- Private finance providers are also struggling to emerge in Scotland because they cannot compete with interest-free loans from Home Energy Scotland. If retrofit is to scale, there needs to be space for privately funded services to develop alongside public schemes

After the session, one attendee asked us to note an additional issue for older people accessing grants. Even with grant eligibility, uncertainty about lengthy payback periods can make additional contributions to retrofit feel unrealistic. The perceived inability to realise financial benefit within a meaningful timeframe is a genuine barrier for many in an older age group.

## Installers

- People reported contractors requiring specific qualifications and accreditations in order to undertake grant-eligible work.
  - For example, it was noted that one customer had to wait months before his contractor could undertake the necessary accreditation for the work he required. Others highlighted contractors travelling between cities daily to undertake work.
  - One had to abandon his application for a grant because the contractor did not have the right accreditation and had to pay for the work up front.
  - One reported having to use a different contractor for grant-eligible work while another contractor was building an extension.
- It was suggested it should be easier to get a Trustmark accreditation

**Part 2.** The group also discussed whether they think the Scottish Government's target to decarbonise heating systems in buildings by 2045 is realistic, and made the points below.

## Incentives

This was the most prominent suggestion from participants – significant financial incentives which would make an impact on people's lives were needed.

- It was suggested more funding would accelerate action.
- It was suggested that it would take incredible political bravery to mandate homeowners to make changes to a property in order to be able to sell it. But other incentives could work such as adjusting LBTT for buildings which had a certain EPC rating. Council tax reductions for such properties were also suggested.

## Price of electricity

- It was suggested the price of gas and electricity should be decoupled.

## **Scale of the challenge**

- People thought there needed to be a considerable step change in pace if the 2045 target was to remain viable.
- There was disappointment that the target in the draft bill (published that day) was 2045 because it was thought:
  - It suggested action could be deferred until then;
  - It put the Paris agreement in jeopardy;
  - It was inequitable – it was thought that developed countries needed to decarbonise heating by the mid 2030s to give developing countries a chance of mitigating the worst case scenarios of climate change.
- Uncertainty for individuals and industry was cited as an issue.

## **Skills**

- The numbers of trained contractors required was discussed and it was suggested many more people would need to be in training for the types of trades required to undertake energy efficiency upgrades and installation of decarbonised heating solutions.

## **Development of advice**

- It was suggested a “fabric first” approach was not necessarily the best way forward any longer.