

**energy
saving
trust**

Qualitative research into domestic property owners' attitudes to net zero heating and energy efficiency standards

Summary report

November 2023



Research background

The Scottish Government commissioned Energy Saving Trust and Taylor McKenzie to undertake research to explore the attitudes of homeowners in Scotland to the potential regulatory standards that may be implemented over 2025 – 2045, dependent on further consultation, for both zero emissions heating and energy efficiency in domestic properties. The qualitative research was conducted in four phases and this summary report outlines the main findings from phases one to four. A total of 32 focus groups were conducted across all four phases, with homeowners from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, locations and housing types. The research explored participants' views on (i) the concept of net zero, (ii) three proposed scenarios for introducing new regulations, (iii) the support needed to comply with any new regulations, (iv) the fairest way to introduce these regulations in a phased approach and (v) the different ways in which the public can be educated on the proposed regulations and home upgrades that will be required to reach the net zero targets.

Awareness of and attitudes towards net zero

Net zero was a term **most participants were aware of** but there was **limited understanding** of what this means for them at an individual level. Participants were **sceptical** about the government's ability to take action, even though they were generally positive about the environmental motivations to reach the net zero targets. However, the reality of meeting these targets was uncertain as the timeframe did not seem achievable for all households due to the current cost of living crisis.

Whilst most participants agreed that something needs to be done to reduce emissions and help Scotland reach net zero, there was a disconnect between agreeing with this and taking responsibility themselves to take action. Many stated the cost of complying and not seeing a clear, personal financial benefit from upgrading their properties as the main barriers.

Whilst participants were not against the imposition of standards in domestic properties, they said that **the government should be leading from the front** as well as industry and big business. Participants said that their impact as individuals was much smaller in comparison to big businesses and industry and that they want to see these organisations taking action too.

Scenarios

Three scenarios of how potential new regulations could be introduced were discussed with the participants. Overall, there was **positivity towards the scenarios**, with all participants understanding that regulations must be in place to encourage change; however, there **were concerns about the reality of implementing these regulations**. There was a lot of anxiety around enforcing change and imposing laws and this was concerning for the participants, specifically given the current economic climate and the increasing cost of living. Most understood the importance of environmental improvements; however, the financial impact of these changes was of higher importance to the audience.

The most salient views on the scenarios included:



Any home changing ownership would be required to meet a minimum energy efficiency standard and have a zero-emissions heating system installed – the overall reaction to this scenario was negative, specifically for the new or soon-to-be buyers. According to the participants, this scenario would harm the housing market and people's ability to buy properties.



The regulations would set deadlines for property owners to carry out certain energy efficiency improvements (2033) and zero emissions heating system installations (2045) – this was seen as the fairest and most achievable scenario out of the three. It gives people time to prepare and know what they need to do. Nevertheless, all participants – not just those who are financially vulnerable – had concerns about their ability to pay for these changes.



The regulations would apply at the point of boiler breakdown – this was considered the least wasteful way to implement changes as it does not enforce the replacement of heating systems that still work well. Questions were raised about the practicality of making these changes in an emergency because participants were aware that more work needs to be done in a house before a heat pump is installed.

Phasing

A phased approach is the best way to implement change as it would reduce the 'all at once' rush to meet a 'one and only' final deadline. Participants suggested **council housing** and **new build developments** to be the first to make the upgrades required. There was a debate as to who follows, with some supporting that those with the highest incomes/tax brackets should go after and others saying that the houses with the most significant improvements required should go after instead.

Some participants suggested a minimum of five years' notice before the final deadline of a proposed regulation, while some others felt that ten years would be most suited, as they are concerned that they will not have enough time to save up for the changes required.

Support needed

There are two main areas that participants said would help them to meet any new standards:

- **Clear advice on what they need to do and why.** The participants had many questions about the regulations and what they will mean for them personally. They were looking mainly to the Scottish Government to provide advice and clear information on the regulations. The information must be easily accessible and simple to understand and is best suited coming from government sources or trusted and impartial bodies so that the participants know that they are being told what is best for their situation as opposed to just being sold to by someone with a commercial interest.
- **Financial support.** Due to the current cost of living crisis, all participants requested significant financial support available to everyone who asks for it, not only the most vulnerable. Many mentioned that there is an assumption that people who own their own homes have disposable income and money to spend on home improvements, however, given the current economic climate, many people who would be considered financially stable are struggling. Support might be in the form of grants, interest-free loans, equity loans, arrangements through mortgages or other incentives ie reduced electricity bills, tax relief etc. All financial support must be signposted with clear information on eligibility and must be easily accessible.

Public engagement

There needs to be a **large-scale campaign** to engage with the public about all required changes and the reasoning behind them. The campaign needs to be widely distributed and target all aspects of the population; it needs to start with an upfront 'education' piece to help people understand why the changes are required, what net zero means and the impact it will have on people and their properties. The information needs to be distributed as soon as possible, to give people enough time to understand what is going to change and the impact this will have on them.



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