



AFFORDABLE WARMTH & HOME

ENERGY EFFICIENCY STRATEGY - 2019-2023

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION RESPONSE REPORT



1 Engagement Overview

Stakeholder engagement was an essential part of the development and implementation of the Affordable Warmth and Home Energy Efficiency Strategy. The main aspects for the engagement process centred on:

- The successful development and finalisation of the Vision and Priorities;
- Identifying the main opportunities, challenges and issues related to home energy efficiency and affordable warmth in the Scottish Borders and the role of wider Partnerships;
- The proposal of a suitable Implementation Plan and solutions that will address these challenges and issues, as well as Outcomes that demonstrate the actions have been met.

A pivotal aspect of the engagement with the Strategy centred on the creation of the Borders Home Energy Forum. The Borders Home Energy Forum is guided by the Local Housing Strategy priority 2: More people live in good quality energy efficient homes. The aim of the Forum is to ensure that a strategic, multi-agency approach is taken to help reduce fuel poverty, improve energy efficiency and improve health and well-being in the Scottish Borders, particularly for the most vulnerable households. This aim will mainly be delivered through designing and implementing the Affordable Warmth and Home Energy Efficiency Strategy. Consequently, the Strategy was driven by the Forum, was a collaborative endeavour and will be very much owned by the Forum moving forward.

The programme of engagement activity included the following:

1. Consultation across Housing Strategy, Policy and Development and wider services at SBC including Financial Inclusion, Social Work and Communities and Partnerships;
2. Engagement at the Borders Home Energy Forum focusing on the technical elements of the Actions, and the advice and support elements;
3. A series of semi-structured interviews, face-to-face or over the phone, with members of the Borders Home Energy Forum and their relative colleagues. This process was extended to other stakeholders (full engagement list detailed below);
4. Engagement with community representatives, NHS Borders and the wider Health and Social Care Partnership;
5. Engagement with the Energy Efficient Scotland Change Works in Peebles Working group and academics working on the monitoring and evaluation programme at the University of Edinburgh;
6. Two presentations to community groups associated with NHS Borders: 'Public Partnership Forum' and 'Public Reference Group';
7. An online public consultation, detailed further in Section 0.

A diverse range of partners, stakeholders and housing experts participated in developing the Strategy and these included:

Berwickshire Association of Voluntary Services	SBC Communities and Partnerships
Berwickshire Housing Association	SBC Financial Inclusion Team
Borders College	SBC Local Area Coordination Team
Changeworks	SBC Social Work Services
Citizens Advice Bureau	SBHA
Eildon Housing	Scottish Association of Landlords
Health and Social Care Partnership	SPRING Social Prescribing
Home Energy Scotland	University of Edinburgh
NHS Borders Health Improvement Team	Warmworks
NHS Borders Public Health	Waverley Housing
NHS Borders Well Being Service	What Matters Hubs

The content and outcomes from the engagement was collated, reviewed and analysed. The engagement helped to support the emerging Priorities, challenges and wider key themes. The information from the engagement was used throughout the drafting of the Strategy, to inform and help validate the development of the Priorities and Actions.

2 Consultation Overview and Response

After a draft vision and priorities for our Strategy was developed with our partners and, prior to the strategy being finalised, we wanted to make sure that local people, communities and stakeholders have their say on whether the Strategy will make a positive contribution to meeting the needs of people in the Borders.

The Council's Executive Committee approved the Consultative Draft of the Strategy on 26th February and following this, it was put out for public consultation on the Councils online Consultation Hub and closed on the 21st May 2019.

The online survey was emailed to a wide range of stakeholders including equality groups and intermediary groups that were able to represent equality groups. It was publicised on the Council's web space and social media, which was then shared by colleagues further. The Borders Home Energy Forum members also supported the publicising of the online survey. Vulnerable and hard to reach groups were engaged through the use of intermediary groups such as RSLs, community groups and through colleagues in Health and Social Care and NHS Borders. To address issues around digital exclusion, paper copies were sent to intermediary groups that requested them and these were then made available at meetings etc. with members of the community or with social tenants.

As the Strategy moved towards its final draft, the material from this consultation contributed to the sense-checking and validation of the Strategy, particularly around the vision, the range of issues covered by the Strategy and the Priorities.

The remainder of this report provides a summary of the responses to this consultation, a response or clarification to the points raised by the respondents (if applicable) and importantly, it identifies any changes made to the Strategy based on the responses received.

Responses

The consultation, in the form of an online survey, was divided into 4 sections reflecting the Strategy and within each section, different questions were presented accordingly. The responses to these 4 sections are discussed in turn below.

As well as the 11 questions listed in the table, we included a section at the start of the survey titled 'About You', in order to gain a better understanding of who our respondents were and here we asked:

- If they are an individual or organisation/group;
- What tenure type they live in; social rented, private rented, owner occupied or other;
- Where they live or where their group is based

In total, we received **8 responses**. All respondents were individuals with **2** living in the social rented sector, and **6** owner occupiers and all were from different areas of the Scottish Borders.

Section	No.	Question
Vision & Priorities	1	Do you think the three Priorities outlined in the consultative draft will help to deliver the Vision for this Strategy? Are there any priorities that are missing?
	2	What opportunities and challenges does the local context of the Scottish Borders present with regards to affordable warmth and home energy efficiency?
	3	What further support could Scottish Borders Council provide that could benefit those being affected by fuel poverty?
Issues & Barriers	4	What do you think are the main issues and barriers to increasing affordable warmth in the Scottish Borders?
	5	What do you think are the main issues and barriers to increasing home energy efficiency in the Scottish Borders
Key Outcomes & Actions	6	Do you think that the key outcomes and actions in Priority 1 will help to ensure that the Scottish Borders are collectively working towards improving affordable warmth and energy efficiency in homes? Are there any barriers that will stop us delivering these actions?
	7	Do you think that the key outcomes and actions in Priority 2 will help to ensure that wider measures to better manage energy and increase warmth in the home are utilised? Are there any barriers that will stop us delivering these actions?
	8	Do you think that the key outcomes and actions in Priority 3 will help to ensure that the Strategy provides opportunities for all in the Scottish Borders? Are there any barriers that will stop us delivering these actions?
Further Comments	9	What actions do you think would have the biggest impact in encouraging an increase in affordable warmth and home energy efficiency in the Borders?
	10	What do you think your contribution to increasing affordable warmth and home energy efficiency in the Borders could be?
	11	Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

2.1 Vision and Priorities

You Said

Property condition and energy supply

One of the key points that arose in this section was the nature of housing in the Borders. Respondents recognised several issues around the condition of properties in the Borders including: their age; poor quality and condition of the buildings; poor insulation; poor heating systems; disparate nature of housing; many off-gas properties and also the barriers surrounding properties which are either listed or exist in conservation areas. These factors all make any upgrades or changes to the houses very challenging and difficult. One respondent, in comment to this, suggested reviewing legislation/protection surrounding these buildings, as this could result in costs to upgrades increasing.

As well as old homes, new homes were also mentioned, with respondents suggesting new homes should be built to: the highest standards of energy efficiency (SBC Planning controls) and renewables should be built in where possible. The topic of renewables was mentioned by 2 further respondents, with 1 respondent suggesting that there are useful sources of energy from waterways (to create electricity) and; another pointing out the availability of woodland, and that naturally fallen trees could be donated/exchanged/banked to 'community wood stores', which would be both ecologically beneficial and minimise the cost of warmth. In terms of providing heat and power to homes, 1 respondent voiced concerns around properties being entirely dependent on electricity, as well as feeling as though people are forced into being all electric, in case of power outages.

Financial barriers and deprivation

Financial barriers were pointed out by 4 respondents as being a key issue. The main themes included: concerns around energy prices, perceived as a root cause for fuel poverty; lower than average wages in the Borders; the availability, and perceived lack of, financial support and; improved funding for homeowners for various measures, with a choice of contractors. Another reoccurring theme from responses was the need to target areas of high deprivation and low income. This was coupled with the suggestion of an energy efficiency hub in these areas, and the requirement for more time and effort to engage within these communities.

Other themes and opportunities

The ageing population of the area was mentioned by 2 respondents, pointing out the need to help elderly homeowners.

Other themes included: the lack of direct influence of the Council across Registered Social Landlords and the Private Rented Sector; the recognition by one respondent that climate change is a top priority and so more action must be taken including trying to maximise funding; ensuring that the root cause of fuel poverty for the Borders is understood and how we can think about prevention; concerns that the more help given to people, the less responsibility taken for their actions. One respondent felt that although the priorities are admirable they only address current issues, but did not provide further information on potential future issues.

There were also opportunities suggested, which included: the use of funding streams like Climate Change Fund to work with communities; sourcing companies who can carry out the work to budget and time and; although Home Energy Scotland is positive, greater publicity and advertisement of this would raise awareness to more people and let them know what they can benefit from.

One respondent added that the language used for priorities 2 and 3 such as; explore, ensure and 'provides opportunity' could be more definite and tangible, for example by replacing explore with use.

We Did

It was encouraging to see that respondents were able to reinforce views with respect to the nature of the housing stock in the Borders, and the associated challenges and barriers these present when looking to improve home energy efficiency. Respondents were also keen to ensure that we target and support areas of deprivation and low income and vulnerable households. These priority areas align with the developed aspirations for this Strategy, with Actions presented in Priority 3 accordingly.

We recognise there are financial barriers to alleviating fuel poverty and improving home energy efficiency and will continue to ensure that we are able to raise awareness of the support available across SBC Services and the grants and loans available by Scottish Government. We will also continue to work with our Partners to attract funding to support further those that are in fuel poverty.

We acknowledge the concerns raised around the influence we can have on RSLs and PRS. Nonetheless, the Borders Home Energy Forum is providing an excellent platform to work alongside the 4 main RSLs, and we will continue to work with the Scottish Government and Home Energy Scotland to engage with the PRS, including hosting training and workshops on the energy efficiency agenda.

On the basis of this consultation, the language used in Priority 2 and 3 will be reviewed with the aim to provide more definitive and tangible terms in the Actions. Lastly, we are grateful for the recommendations put forward by respondents for the potential to develop energy efficiency projects.

2.2 Issues and Barriers

You Said

Within this section, many of the issues raised in the 'Vision and Priorities' section were reiterated, emphasising their importance. Again, in the opinion of the respondents, the main issues and barriers to increasing affordable warmth and home energy efficiency in the Borders are:

- The **physical nature of the Borders and its properties**; old buildings; rurality and distance between communities; difficulty in making improvements to properties – particularly in listed buildings and conservation areas where regulation makes this difficult and expensive. One respondent makes the point that 'allowing sympathetic and appropriate upgrades that modernise historically relevant properties would enhance the local communities for all, as well as improving overall health and welfare of families in the Borders'.
- The importance in **engaging with hard to reach and vulnerable groups**, and that this requires time and expertise. As well as putting out information in an understandable and meaningful way, so that everyone is aware of what their options may be.
- **Cost** – including that Borders wages are lower than average; the barrier for some of earning too much to be eligible, with one respondent in this situation stating that their wage is only slightly above the national average; questions as to whether the costs associated with solar panels (buying, maintenance and ongoing risk) would outweigh the cost of gas; lack of finance of householders to be able to spend on upgrades etc.
- A **lack of understanding** from decision makers on what it is like to live in poor conditions (cold, damp, mould etc.) and the effects this has on an individual's health.
- The number of **knowledgeable and willing tradespeople** in the supply chain to carry out surveys/quotes/upgrades for energy efficiency schemes; inability to secure an appropriate vendor.
- **Reservations** surrounding all electric, despite trouble with the cost of gas – furthermore, **reluctance** of some those with solid fuel fires to change.
- **Expectations** of people.

In addition, one response poses an opportunity in this section – to explore the use of renewables on a community basis, for example community wind turbines or solar panels.

We Did

As with the previous section, it was encouraging to see the strategy aiming to cover and address key issues and barriers identified by the respondents. Additionally, this section demonstrates that a key priority for us is to ensure that we are able to raise awareness of the support available, in particular where to access financial support and information on the benefits of different energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades.

An additional priority we need to develop further is around the local supply chain and alongside this Strategy we have started to understand the barriers and drivers for the local supply chain in Peebles. The findings will support longer-term efforts in the area over the duration of the Strategy.

On the basis of this consultation we will: consider carefully the language used when engaging with the public; minimise the use of acronyms and; ensure that information on advice and support is provided in an easily accessible format in a range of mediums.

2.3 Key Outcomes and Actions

You Said

When answering the questions in this section relating to the key outcomes and actions, there were mixed responses in which common themes, as well as some new points, arose.

One respondent felt that the outcomes and actions would only help a proportion of the population: 'not helping everybody just a % of the population, yet the % of that you don't help, funds the % that you do help'. This highlights uncertainty surrounding both the access to money to support homeowners and how it is spent, as well as what help is offered and the eligibility of funding etc. A further respondent stated that funding to people who earn over a certain amount 'will never be allowed' and so in this way not everyone can be helped.

Four respondents highlighted the importance of focusing on areas of high deprivation and although these respondents were supportive of the key outcomes and actions, they emphasised that we must reach out and find the people and properties most in need. The requirement for further engagement and discussion with communities on their experiences was mentioned as a means to give an insight into how warmth and energy efficiency could be improved where they live. One respondent pointed out that winter illnesses and deaths occurring due to people not receiving the help they need is a problem in the UK, raising the concern of the link between fuel poverty and health issues.

A further respondent supported the outcomes and actions in that people who want to make a difference will change their behaviour, however they voiced concern and suggested that some people may view this as an opportunity to access money.

There were positive opinions towards the use of developing case studies, and suggestions utilising active links between CLD Learning Community Partnerships, community groups and stakeholders across various Borders communities.

There were also concerns raised in this section: the use of acronyms should be avoided when engaging with the public (such as HEEPS), as this can make it difficult to follow the various schemes and; trusted organisations have an essential role to play. Lastly, one respondent stated 'Get rid of the iPad idea. There are children freezing in their bed but have an iPad funded by the Council'.

We Did

Responses to this section reinforced further the need to raise awareness around financial advice and support, in particular for households and landlords that are considered to be in the 'self-funded' market by the Scottish Government.

A key response in this section for the Strategy is the importance of working with community and intermediary groups as a means to gain access and insight to supporting households in need. We will also aim to continue to progress our actions around developing case studies, presenting them on our web space and using them during engagement opportunities. Lastly, this section presented a note of caution around unintended consequences of providing financial support for fuel poverty and home energy efficiency. To mitigate this, we will continue to work with Scottish Government and Home Energy Scotland, as well as ECO funding. These sources of funding have adequate checks in place around the provision of funding to support households and measures.

2.4 Further Comments

You Said

There were several different ideas put across for what respondents felt could have the biggest impact in encouraging and increasing affordable warmth and home energy efficiency in the Borders, including:

- Support to communities and in particular areas of deprivation; ‘time, effort and expertise to **engage with target groups** and communication of messages in an understandable and meaningful way’, as well as creative and imaginative approaches to utilise the power of communities to do things for themselves; draw down funding to support work in target areas of deprivation. Also, provide **support for community enterprises** such as solar panels and wind turbines, or creating a way for people to make use of windfall after storms – a communal wood shed at the recycling station was suggested.
- **Raising awareness** was also mentioned, with one respondent suggesting ‘getting the message across’ particularly to older people. There was also a suggestion made to **offer instructional materials** on improving energy efficiency of solid fuel fires, which would be particularly useful in older homes which already have fireplaces, as with correct maintenance and repair they can readily provide heat in a sufficient, safe and healthy way.
- Strong positive action by Government to force **behaviour change** of providers of homes.
- Another put forward the effectiveness of getting a **major supplier** on board, using an example of a recently opened facility in Aberdeen.
- Grants for homeowners regardless of income – or **assess affordability** based on outgoings, and not income alone.
- **Maximise income** – increase economy and signpost to trusted organisations that support people to move out of poverty.

One respondent put forward that one of two scenarios could take place, **1)** take no action and allow the private sector to take over through natural course or **2)** force change upon people.

In relation to what respondents felt their contribution could be, answers were as follows:

- 5 of the respondents discussed home energy efficiency measures, with 2 already having invested in measures such as solar panels, light bulbs, insulation and updating of windows with one also stating they try to minimise waste (behaviour).
- 2 responses stated that they would be willing to ‘make their home more eco-friendly’ and take such measures, however cannot afford to or do not plan on making these changes unless it is financially worthwhile.
- 1 respondent pointed out that while they can keep their thermostat down, this can cause issues due to a health condition.
- 1 respondent states that as a social rented tenant they want to raise awareness of what the experience of living in fuel poverty can be like, and is campaigning to help make a difference.
- 1 respondent is willing to communicate key messages through the CLD Learning Community Partnerships through their role at work, and as a local community member is organising a community conversation around making their village greener.

Finally, under any other comments, two points were raised:

- 1 respondent states ‘stop penalising people who earn too much to qualify for help but want to make a change’ and goes on to highlight that landlords, who are property owners, are supported, however homeowners struggle to access help to make improvements.
- 1 respondent stressed that fuel poverty is not only for critically poor people, and that owning a home is a responsibility and a privilege – ‘no one should have to choose between having fuel for a furnace and feeding their kids, whatever their tax bracket may be.’

We Did

This section was able to reinforce again the power and the potential of working alongside community groups within this domain, as well as raising awareness of advice and support available around financing and funding. It was encouraging to hear how respondents are already investing in home energy efficiency (and organising and campaigning on this topic) and that others are willing to invest given the right circumstances.

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HOUSING STRATEGY, POLICY & DEVELOPMENT

Scottish Borders Council HQ | Newtown St Boswells | MELROSE | TD6 0SA tel: 01835 825144 |
email: housingenquiries@scotborders.gov.uk

