

# Accelerating retrofit through advice and information

In November 2023, **Energy Saving Trust** convened a group of retrofit policy experts. The aim was to consider how effective provision of advice and information could accelerate retrofit of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating in England.

This note reflects the discussion and builds on our report for the Climate Change Committee 'International Policy that Cuts Costs.'<sup>1</sup> This report identified successful international advice driven retrofit schemes and information campaigns.

## Behaviours and breaking down barriers to action

The behaviours that support retrofit and demand reduction range from installing insulation and heating measures to using smart technologies and reducing or shifting consumption.

Many friction points can be remedied with information or advice across several phases of action: considering, organising, installing and operating. Barriers to homes taking retrofit action are well known – cost, hassle and homes lack tailored information.



Willingness to act varies more by age than by income groups. Among homeowners:

- 47% said they were willing to install improved insulation in the next two years.
- 41% for triple-glazed windows or solar panels on roof.
- 28% for heat pumps.<sup>2</sup>

## Successful international retrofit schemes and information campaigns

Impartial advice underpins France and Scotland's retrofit plans. France's scheme delivered 600,000 renovations in 2022 (10% whole house retrofit) and over than 157,000 heat pumps. Home Energy Scotland delivers free, impartial, tailored advice from which 44% install a measure, 87% for heat pumps. Scotland has a much higher installation rate of heat pumps than England.

France's Energy Sufficiency information campaign has achieved a 12% energy demand reduction. Public and private sectors both lead by example and have published commitments to drive down own energy use. This is integrated with advice and retrofit provision to encourage and enable homes to make fabric and behaviour changes. An ambitious second phase launched in summer 2023 focussing on actions with longer term impact.

MaPrimeRenov 	Home Energy Scotland 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The scheme provides different funding streams with variable levels of support for homeowners at multiple incomes levels, types of ownership and support for different types of homes.</li> <li>• The French scheme also includes a directory of local installers, access to local advisors and a 'renovation guide.'</li> <li>• The scheme website streamlines the customer journey and handles the grant application and financial flow all in one.</li> <li>• There are increasingly links to local one stop shop delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is available to households (owner occupiers, tenants) and smaller private landlords.</li> <li>• The advice is delivered online, by phone and in person, helping overcome the behavioural and financial barriers to the installation of energy efficiency improvements and renewable heating.</li> <li>• It works alongside existing advice providers with strong referral paths into and out of the service, offering a simple customer journey.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/climate-policy-that-cuts-costs-international-policy-comparison-energy-saving-trust-green-alliance/>

<sup>2</sup> [Public First polling for Centrica - Public First](#)

## What are the features of successful retrofit advice services and information?

The roundtable event considered the features of successful retrofit advice services and information campaigns – and some of the critical barriers to delivery:

<b>Simple messaging</b>	Simple, clear, consistent messaging helps people to engage with and understand the information and advice that is provided.
<b>Tailored information</b>	The UK's homes are very varied and non-homogenous. Tailored information will help households to know what measures they need, how to install them and what the specific benefits are for them.
<b>Recognised and trusted intermediary</b>	A trusted intermediary (such as Citizens Advice, Energy Saving Trust or Which?) can increase the legitimacy of the message of information or advice.
<b>Support for all income groups</b>	Services tend to concentrate on support for fuel poor and vulnerable consumers. But because of the complexity of retrofitting, households from of all income groups will need support before and after installing measures. Landlords and SMEs also benefit from support.
<b>No cost at point of access</b>	Cost can be a significant barrier to retrofit. So, advice and information will be more effective if it's at no cost to homes (or low cost where appropriate). This lowers barriers during the investigation phase.
<b>Simple customer journey</b>	A single front end providing a simple customer journey, multichannel approach and 'having everything in one place' are key features of the French and Scottish advice services. This helps households to know where to go for advice, find trusted installers and doesn't require them to work to find support.
<b>End to end service</b>	Retrofit can be confusing and complex. Providing an end-to-end service will increase the number of homes who act. Such a service should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fully integrated with existing statutory services.</li> <li>• help households to understand what they need to do.</li> <li>• provide support or 'handholding' at each stage and post installation aftercare.</li> </ul>
<b>Co-ordination of finance options</b>	Access to finance options, from grants to commercial loans, in one place will help households be clear about how they can fund upgrades to their homes. This will encourage more homes to act. France's service has a digital funding finder, and Home Energy Scotland acts as the gateway to all the support provided by Scottish government.
<b>Engagement with the supply chain</b>	The supply chain needs to be supported to scale up capacity when needed and provide a modular service (e.g. someone who fits a heat pump coming back to service in the future). It also plays a key role in providing consistent messaging by signposting information and advice services.
<b>Long term commitment</b>	Signalling a long-term commitment to providing advice and information will build trust among consumers and the supply chain. It will also sustain private sector funding.
<b>Combine national advice with local delivery</b>	Advice and information can be developed and maintained centrally and then distributed by local actors. France's retrofit advice scheme and the way the NHS provides health advice are good examples of this model. Strong referrals into and out of advice schemes are essential.
<b>Consistent consumer protections</b>	At the moment, people are left to try and diagnose what's gone wrong post retrofit or installation of decarb technology. Many will need support accessing redress to get the right outcomes, whether that's alternative dispute resolution, ombudsman schemes or other.

## Critical barriers to effective advice and information delivery

Availability and cost of advice	Political will	Limited information on key technologies	Lack of trust
Many effective advice services are free at to use (e.g. France, Scotland) and are national or local government funded. Others can require a cost or partial cost met by householders (e.g. Canada).	There has been a political reluctance to deploy information and advice on the basis that it would be – ‘telling people what to do’ or ‘nannying.’ But international experience shows how advice supports greater free market delivery.	Now, there’s limited impartial information available about key technologies such as heat pumps. At worst there’s significant misinformation or a focus on poor installations or edge cases.	Information and advice can be more effective if offered by a recognised and trusted third party. People need to be able to trust installers who will make changes to their homes and resolve any problems.

## Towards a retrofit plan for England

### Fabric first? Decarbonising heat fast vs deep retrofit

To decarbonise at pace, decision makers increasingly need to consider the trade-off between deep retrofit and accelerating the deployment of low carbon heating. The latter may have higher ongoing costs (and considerations around lower use and hence bills for fuel poor homes) and mean larger infrastructure build out.

The increasing decarbonisation of the electricity grid challenges the traditional ‘fabric first’ approach if the policy aim is affordable decarbonisation. Where some measures (cavity wall and loft insulation in particular) are low cost and have high impact, other measures can be more expensive and disruptive (e.g. external wall insulation). **Each home is different so support provided to homes will need to be tailored to work out what’s best for them and their circumstances.**

### What do consumers need from a retrofit plan?

Consumers need:

- better **clarity** about what they need to do in their own home.
- **confidence** in the process and the tradespeople who’ll do the work.
- access to **cash** – whether that’s grants, cheap loans or paying upfront.

Some homes will need a greater depth of advice and support, enhancing take up of government schemes. Consumer protection needs to be stronger in a market where there has been poor practice, scams, and rogue traders in operation. There’s a multitude of different consumer codes and separate protection arrangements depending on the funding route. Enforcement needs adequate resourcing. Policy stability is needed for the supply chain and people who are thinking about making changes to their homes, and for installers to plan business growth against.

### How does advice, information and retrofit come together?

We need to remove the pain points, but we also need to engage people. There’s an advice postcode lottery in England. Comprehensive independent advice should be a **core part of the infrastructure** needed for the net zero transition. There also needs to be a properly coordinated strategy for England to ensure there’s tailored advice, available funding and private finance options.

It needs to be accompanied by a properly funded public awareness campaign that directs people to this advice. This campaign should also drive the action together with a sufficient pool of high-quality installers providing excellent aftercare.

## Key features of a retrofit plan for England

Advice and information should be part of the infrastructure of a retrofit plan for England.

<p><b>A plan needs to provide leadership, a clear steer, a long-term commitment and policy certainty</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>A retrofit plan needs to deliver certainty</b> around the regulatory framework. The market can respond, and households can confidently plan changes to their homes.</li> <li>● A new long-term plan should <b>build upon, not replace existing support schemes</b> (e.g. BUS)</li> <li>● Energy saving from <b>retrofit should be valued on a par with energy generation</b></li> <li>● There should be an <b>integration of government efforts</b> (break down government silos) and a <b>long-term funding commitment from Treasury</b> (similar to the Republic of Ireland)</li> <li>● <b>Treasury needs to value climate resilience</b> and recognise the increased risk of a 'national liability' if funding is not delivered on a long-term basis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advice and information should be central to a retrofit plan. A national advice service for England should be a core part of the retrofit infrastructure</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A <b>national information campaign</b> will help drive action and reduce demand - awareness campaigns drive traffic to advice services and vice versa.</li> <li>● <b>England needs a national advice service</b> to provide consistency and comprehensive support. Core and consistent information needs to be available from government to support all advice services and local one stop shops. Standards for advice could drive consistency, and there should be clarity of retrofit terms and definitions</li> <li>● <b>High quality advice and information should be available for all households</b>, including private and social rented sectors designed to lead to retrofit actions and demand reduction. This should build on existing schemes to provide advice to landlords (e.g. Home Energy Scotland) and provide better understanding of behavioural changes that can help residents</li> <li>● <b>Common and consistent advice needs to be provided on core issues</b> such as expectations for how homes likely to be heated in the future (e.g. whether in a heat network zone)</li> <li>● The <b>advice service should signpost to a variety of trusted installers</b> from national suppliers to local builders' merchants and local suppliers.</li> <li>● The <b>advice service should give a clear picture on UK's housing stock</b>, especially for local authorities or social housing providers to help with local area planning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other core elements - a retrofit plan should identify barriers and address them</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Funding and finance are needed for all households</b> - deep discounts/full grants for those on low incomes, and partial grants/low cost for higher incomes.</li> <li>● <b>Effective support needs to avoid bureaucracy</b> and machinery of government snags.</li> <li>● <b>Quality assurance is needed for retrofit</b>, and <b>proportionate consumer protection</b> is needed to give households confidence.</li> <li>● The <b>government should bring together and orchestrate the supply chain</b> to ensure good quality delivery at scale and pace.</li> <li>● <b>Alternatives for gas boilers to be attractive</b>. The market needs to be stimulated.</li> <li>● <b>Advice could be a key part of supporting, delivering and optimising outcomes from community benefit schemes</b> (e.g. from grid infrastructure).</li> </ul>
<p><b>A plan should facilitate the market to deliver</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Private sector will also play a role in providing advice</b> - consistency is key</li> <li>● <b>Government needs to recognise where it can stand back to enable the private sector to deliver at pace.</b></li> <li>● <b>Government also needs to ensure equal outcomes</b>. Advice and support can help to raise the bar and encourage action across the whole market.</li> <li>● There should be <b>integration of public and private efforts</b> - France demonstrates how public/ private partnerships demonstrating leadership have driven down energy demand and fuelled retrofit. Integration of public and private sector already exists and can be deepened.</li> </ul>

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