

Minutes of Meeting on 9th September 2026



Venue: Online
Time: 02:00 pm – 05:00 pm
Type: Panel Meeting

Attendees



Panel: Matthew Cole (Chair), Kirsten Jenkins, Bryan Leask
Secretariat: Philippa Brosnan
Department for Energy and Net Zero: Jaimi Lallu and Connie Thorn – for agenda item 2.
Apologies: Panel Members - Olivia Swann, Fraser Stewart. Secretariat - Roanna Sefton. Scottish Government - Statistician - Zachary Thompson.

Agenda item 1: Welcome and agenda for today

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies including that the Scottish Government (SG) statisticians are unable to attend to provide the postponed briefing on the Scottish House Condition Survey. The following topics were then discussed: the agenda for the next in-person Panel meeting on 24th of September, Programme for Government and also noting upcoming communication activity.

24th September Panel meeting – a substantial conversation is planned with the Fuel Poverty Policy Team on the SG plan for revising the Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Panel noted that it will be interested to understand whether the strategy will focus more on how existing government programmes contribute to achieving statutory fuel poverty targets and less on creating new actions. It was acknowledged that it will be important for the Panel to consider, once it has heard from SG, how it will plan for responding to any SG asks and how this may impact its workplan.

Programme for Government (PfG) – the Panel noted that fuel poverty and the revision of the Strategy, is not explicitly referenced in the PfG, which is disappointing, although several fuel-poverty related legislative and policy measures are included: the planned introduction of the Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill alongside supporting clean heating and energy

efficiency measures for around 100,000 properties in Scotland and enabling the scale up of heat networks; energy bill support for those with health conditions requiring life saving equipment and those with terminal illnesses; refreshing the Energy Strategy, community energy support and improving accessibility to local advice services. The Panel also recognised that the Public Service Reform commitments have potential implications for the future shape of the Panel.

Communication activity – the Panel’s new public affairs agency is to attend on the 24th to introduce themselves and their approach, present their ideas, and discuss how the Panel can use its limited communications’ budget effectively to influence and drive fuel poverty policy change. The Panel will be supporting Scottish Housing Day (theme this year: Healthy Homes, Healthy Futures) by highlighting the Panel’s work on fuel poverty and health and the Panel’s summer newsletter will be published next week.

The Chair noted that also next week he will be meeting the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy, Mr Gethins.

Agenda item 2: Warm Homes Plan overview

The Chair welcomed the DESNZ officials – Connie Thorn, Strategy Adviser, Net Zero Buildings Strategy and Jaimi Lallu, to the meeting, thanking for them for attending to present to the Panel on the Warm Homes Plan (for England) (WHP) and noting that although the WHP is for England, there are obvious synergies with Scotland in the fuel poverty landscape.

Connie then gave an overview of the WHP.

The UK Government’s WHP was published in January 2026 - its flagship strategy for reducing household energy bills, improving energy efficiency and supporting the transition away from fossil fuels in homes. The situation in the Middle East has significantly increased the pressures on affordability of energy bills. Recent UK Gov. action has seen £150 taken off bills from April 2026 and a 6-month VAT exemption for electricity bills.

The WHP is underpinned by £15 billion of public investment and is the largest programme of home upgrade investment to date, with support available across all household types while maintaining a particular focus on low-income households.

The key aims of the WHP are by 2030 to have:

- Upgrade up to 5 million homes.

- Deliver 450,000 heat pump installations per year.
- Lift 1 million households out of fuel poverty.

A central feature of the Plan is targeted support for households on low incomes. Of the total funding package, £5 billion is earmarked for low-income households, primarily through: the Warm Homes Local Grant, delivered through local authorities and the Warm Homes Social Housing Fund, delivered through social landlords. UK Government intends to integrate these programmes into a single area-based scheme from 2027-28, enabling more coordinated local delivery and neighbourhood-scale upgrades.

An additional £600 million of the Warm Homes Fund is set aside specifically for low-income households

Alongside support for low-income households, the Plan includes measures aimed at the wider owner-occupier market, recognising that upfront costs remain a significant barrier. Measures include:

- Expansion of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS).
- Increased BUS grants for households currently using heating oil.
- Development of low-interest and potentially zero-interest loans for technologies such as heat pumps, solar panels and batteries.

The Plan also includes broader market and regulatory reforms, including:

- Reform of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) using the new Home Energy Model.
- New minimum energy efficiency standards in the private and social rented sectors.
- Implementation of Future Homes Standards for new-build properties.
- Greater consideration of overheating and climate adaptation through passive cooling measures and technologies providing both heating and cooling.

Consumer protection is a key theme. Following issues identified in previous energy efficiency programmes and the National Audit Office's review, the UK Government is simplifying certification processes, strengthening oversight of installers and improving consumer confidence in retrofit measures. As part of this, it is closing ECO down at the end of December 2026 and managing the transition to ensure that the ECO supply chain can transition into existing schemes to ensure no drop off in delivery for fuel poor households and maintain jobs in the eco supply chain.

The WHP also enables the establishment of a Warm Homes Agency from 2027, to provide consumer advice and streamline some of the delivery arrangements currently undertaken by organisations such as Ofgem and Salix, creating a more coherent customer journey. There's also an aspiration to create a market for emerging technologies and recently plug in solar was made available in the UK market for the first time. A recent call for evidence on community batteries will support understanding of use community batteries and scaling them up to provide benefits to local communities. A call for evidence was also made for the £5b capital investment of the Warm Homes Fund and the results of this are currently being analysed. This is likely to published shortly.

Jaimi Lallu provided an update on developments since the publication of the WHP. Eligibility criteria and an understanding of the groups to be reached in the fuel poverty space may have implications for future low-income support schemes, In addition to the UK Government energy bill reduction levels, mentioned above and the support for emerging technologies (plug-in solar, including allocating £25 million for a pilot programme supporting plug-in solar for low-income households and the call for evidence on community batteries) there have been fuel poverty policy developments. These include:

- Introducing an annual Fuel Poverty Outcomes Report to improve accountability and track progress against strategic objectives.
- Greater focus on cross-government outcomes, including health impacts, child poverty and referral pathways through frontline services, e.g. including some of the established frontline services such as neighbourhood health centres.
- Understand specific impacts of Fuel Poverty schemes on health conditions – evidence tends to be generic but there are aspects of quantitative evidence or qualitative evidence about the impacts of cold homes on health, if they can be teased out.
- Work with health sector partners to strengthen evidence on the relationship between fuel poverty, housing conditions and health outcomes, e.g. keen to develop existing metrics further.

The UK Government has also committed to developing a new fuel poverty target to replace the current 2030 target which focusses on improving homes occupied by fuel-poor households to EPC Band C where reasonably practicable by 2030. Early consideration is being given to how future fuel poverty should be measured and what lessons may be learned from approaches taken elsewhere, including Scotland

Finally, the recent publication of the Committee on Fuel Poverty's annual report, making several recommendations relating to energy affordability, energy efficiency

standards, public confidence and support for vulnerable households, was highlighted. A formal Government response to this will be made later this year.

In discussion, the Panel made the following points and DESNZ responded:

- Noted the challenge of building a supply chain – including components and skills-base – to deliver on the 450k heat pumps/annum. DESNZ responded that they're working closely with industry to understand what they need from government and have set up a workforce task force too. There are also WHP commitments to incentivise skills development and a number of programmes are underway. The expectation is that most of the 450k will be through WHP grants or loans.
- Point made that even with such a challenging target it will still be many years to transition from gas. DESNZ noted that the 450k target is consistent with the CCC recommendation for getting to the next carbon budget.
- The extent of the monitoring and evaluation framework, sitting beneath the different Fuel Poverty targets and tools and whether there are key gaps, was explored. The publication of the annual fuel poverty outcomes report for this year will include fairly rudimentary metrics but these will develop over time.
- Comparatively, the fuel poverty definition for England has a simplicity about it which enables measurement of fuel poverty reduction, i.e. the relationship between EPCs and stock investment to improve EPC level translates to a measured reduction in the households that are considered to fuel poverty [there is a direct correlation between investment in the housing stock and the reduction in fuel poverty level]. In contrast, in Scotland where there are other factors, fuel poverty levels are modelled, it is much more challenging. It will be interesting to see where the debate goes on definitions.
- The question of reforming energy pricing, decoupling gas and electricity prices and measures such as the Warm Home Discount (WHD) and a social tariff as means of improving energy affordability, were raised. The expansion of the WHD was designed to improve affordability in low-income households and how this could be enhanced is under consideration. Automated household income data is a game changer but also looking at a low-income tool which could provide another route for support. The question of a social tariff is a longer-term question and does relate to pricing, these are live questions and there's a lot of thought going on about these connected to where prices go, consumption levels, the best mechanisms for supporting people to heat their homes etc. Ofgem has just released new consumption data which shows that people underheat more than previously thought.

Agenda item 3: AOB

The Panel reflected further, following the WHP presentation, on the challenges for Scotland's Fuel Poverty Strategy of the current definition which is robust but problematic when it comes to collating and measuring all the policies and programmes which impact on fuel poverty outcomes.

The Panel also discussed energy hardship versus fuel poverty as a potential more accurate way of reflecting what we understand as fuel poverty. The Panel will reflect further on whether it will commission some research in this area.

Looking forward to quarter 4 of the workplan, the Panel also discussed the possibility of doing a short stakeholder survey to inform its next Strategic Plan.

Finally, taking the Periodic Report Response as a starting point, the Panel would like to present Scottish Government with its key advice alongside relevant and connected advice from other organisations. The Secretariat will consider how this should be done.

Next meeting - 24th September, 10:00 am – 04:00 pm at Atlantic Quay 5, Glasgow.