MAKING ENERGY EFFICIENCY FUNDING WORK FOR TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

A RESEARCH STUDY



TDS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Contents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 03

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND POLICY CONTEXT 05

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY 08

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS 10

TRUST AND INFORMATION

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

SCHEME DESIGN AND ACCESS

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPROVING SCHEME DESIGN AND DELIVERY 25

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 27

APPENDIX: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LANDLORDS AND TENANTS 31

Executive Summary

This research explores landlords' and tenants' experiences of energy efficiency funding schemes in the English private rented sector (PRS), focusing on what drives or hinders their uptake and effectiveness. It is based on a total of 38 interviews with landlords, tenants, and stakeholders, and builds on the findings from TDS Charitable Foundation's 2025 'Voice of the Tenant' and 'Voice of the Landlord' survey, featuring responses from over 4000 tenants and landlords.

The UK Government has mandated that all PRS properties must meet higher minimum energy efficiency standards by 2030 (band C on the standard A to G rating scale, as opposed to the current band E).

There have been calls for additional funding to support landlords in meeting these higher standards.[1] However, it is important to understand why previous and existing funding schemes have not been very popular in the PRS, and what other factors would help improve the uptake of these schemes and move the sector further towards greater compliance.

Several key challenges associated with existing funding schemes emerged in the research, including mistrust of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), limited awareness of funding schemes, unanswered questions about retrofit measures, financial concerns, and practical difficulties related to property types and installer availability.

A significant issue was **landlord uncertainty about the effectiveness of energy efficiency upgrades.** Some landlords reported difficulty determining whether measures such as cavity wall insulation or replacement boilers had noticeably improved heating performance. Many expressed frustration with EPC recommendations. Landlords often wanted clear guidance on the simplest and most affordable way to reach EPC band C. However, EPC recommendations are often presented cumulatively rather than individually, which some landlords found confusing. This confusion can discourage taking action.

Mistrust of EPC accuracy was another recurring theme. Several interviewees believed EPC ratings sometimes failed to reflect real-life heating performance. Examples included seemingly well-insulated properties receiving low ratings or assessors being unable to record certain heating technologies, leading to downgraded scores. These perceived inaccuracies undermined confidence in EPCs. This is problematic for several reasons, and because those EPC ratings determine eligibility for many energy efficiency schemes. Stakeholders hope upcoming reforms to EPC metrics will improve accuracy and rebuild trust.

Another issue related to lack of confidence in retrofit measures and technologies. Media reports about poor-quality installations under previous government programmes have damaged trust in some schemes. Heat pumps, in particular, were often viewed negatively by landlords, despite evidence that most users are satisfied with them. In practice, only a few interviewees reported faulty installations, but negative perceptions can still discourage participation in retrofit programmes.

A major structural barrier was low awareness of energy efficiency schemes. Most landlords and tenants could not name specific programmes, and many learned about schemes through leaflets, online advertisements, or recommendations rather than deliberate research. Word-of-mouth within communities played a particularly important role. Because awareness is limited, policymakers cannot assume that households will actively compare different schemes or navigate complex application processes.

[1] National Residential Landlords Association (2021), Greening the Private Rented Sector

The research also highlighted the diversity of landlords. Larger landlords with extensive portfolios were more likely to know about multiple schemes and often relied on letting agents to monitor opportunities. Smaller landlords with one or two properties were less informed and had fewer resources to track changing policies. Estate agents and property professionals therefore play an important role in communicating scheme availability.

Another barrier involved unanswered questions about retrofits. Landlords and tenants often require tailored advice about their specific property, particularly when dealing with older or unusual buildings. When schemes impose requirements that are not suitable for a particular property type, applications may stall. Evidence suggests that personalised advice services or "one-stop-shop" models—where funding information and technical guidance are available together—can significantly increase uptake of energy efficiency measures.

Cost was the most frequently cited barrier to making use of the schemes. Landlords worried about the expense of upgrades and unexpected financial risks, while tenants feared that improvements would lead to rent increases. Amongst interviewees, some rent rises did occur after measures were installed, though they were not always directly attributed to energy upgrades. This fear of rent increases can discourage tenants from requesting improvements.

Finally, **practical challenges remain, particularly for older properties and the retrofit workforce.** Misconceptions persist that historic buildings cannot be upgraded without damaging their character, even though specialist techniques exist. In addition, landlords reported difficulty finding reliable installers, reflecting broader shortages in the skilled retrofit workforce.

Overall, the findings suggest that encouraging greater uptake of funding schemes and improving energy efficiency in rental housing requires clearer guidance, greater awareness of funding schemes, trusted advice services, stronger regulatory enforcement, and policies that address financial risks for both landlords and tenants.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Policy Context

BACKGROUND

Improving PRS uptake of energy efficiency funding schemes amongst those who have a genuine need for them is a important part of raising energy efficiency standards across the UK.

Out of all English housing tenures, private rental homes have the lowest energy efficiency. When ranked on the standard A to G energy performance scale—with 'A' being extremely good and 'G' being extremely poor—more privately rented properties are in the lower D, E, F, and G bands than any other tenure. Only 26% of the social rented sector, and 47% of the owner-occupied sector are in these lowest bands, compared to 49% of the PRS.[2]

On top of this, **almost 1 in 4 private tenants live in fuel poverty.**[3] The 2025 Voice of the Tenant survey—a regular and representative survey of tenant experiences—likewise found that 37% of private tenants found it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford their energy bills.[4]

Taken together, figures like these tell a story of **colder, draughtier homes in the PRS**, with often **worryingly high energy bills and a bigger carbon footprint.**

Why does the PRS have higher numbers of inefficient homes? Existing studies show that barriers might include:

- Tenancy agreement clauses that restrict disruptive retrofit works
- 'Split incentives' for retrofit, since landlords do not personally benefit from cheaper bills or extra warmth, yet tenants are reluctant to invest in properties they do not own [5]
- Inaccurate or confusing Energy Performance Certificates
- Higher numbers of traditionally built houses vs purpose-built modern apartments [6]
- Tenant fears of eviction if they complain about e.g. a broken-down heating system

Despite this, evidence across all housing tenures shows overall progress in the right direction. Within the past decade, the proportion of English homes in the highest A – C energy performance bands has gone from just 26% in 2014, to an encouragingly high 56% in 2024.[7] The PRS has been part of this slow, steady upward trend. In fact, 64% of landlords say they have taken steps to improve the efficiency of some or all of their properties.[8] However, the PRS still **lags behind** other tenures. **Progress could be accelerated**. And with residential buildings the second-largest source of UK carbon emissions, it must be.[9] The UK's legally-binding 2050 Net Zero carbon emissions pledge—and the climate crisis itself—underlines the need for faster progress.

It is surprising, then, that relatively **few applications to energy-efficiency funding schemes come from PRS tenants or landlords**. Estimates vary on the average cost of retrofitting an inefficient PRS home up to a higher band C standard, with one recent government figure putting it at £5400,[10] and an earlier one from

[2] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025), English Housing Survey 2024-2025
[3] Citizens Advice (2023), Room for Improvement: Preparing landlords for new minimum energy efficiency standards
[4] Rich, R., Morrison, J. M., and Smith, A.,TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Letting in the Private Rented Sector: The Voice of the Landlord Survey (Wave 2)
[5] Energy Systems Catapult (2025), Beyond minimum energy efficiency standards: accelerating energy improvements in the private rental sector
[6] NRLA (2021), Greening the Private Rented Sector | [7] MHCLG (2025), English Housing Survey 2024-2025
[8] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Landlord
[9] Climate Change Committee (2025), Progress in reducing emissions: 2025 report to parliament
[10] Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2026), Improving the energy performance of privately rented homes: Government response

the English Housing Survey suggesting £7040.[11] Given this expense, government funding for improvements would seem especially in-demand for eligible tenants and landlords. This is not the case.

Although several such schemes currently exist (and there have been others within recent decades) to equip rental properties with useful measures like insulation, draught-proofing, solar panels, double glazing, and efficient new heating systems and to advise on their installation, these **schemes are often under-used.** And whilst it is true that not all rental properties should be eligible for government funding - as retrofit measures can be largely self-funded amongst landlords who are most financially capable - the numbers of PRS scheme users still appear excessively low even when this is taken into account.

A recent Propertymark letting agent survey found only 20% of their landlord clients had ever accessed support for energy efficiency measures.[12]

On a similar note, the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) 3 scheme had predicted that a significant 34% of its total funding would be used by PRS properties. Only 11% was.

Previous versions of the ECO scheme were also only used by 10-13% PRS households, whilst the final version of this scheme, the ECO4, reached 14% PRS households.[13]

The Great British Insulation Scheme proved similarly unpopular here, with the PRS accounting for only **8% of households using it.**[14]

Evidence from the 2025 Voice of the Landlord survey also suggests there are surrounding challenges, beyond cost, with the funding schemes and with the general retrofit process:

- 16% of landlords in England said uncertainty about future regulations prevented them from retrofitting, whilst the same number said they felt unsure which were the best measures to take.
- 15% also worried about the disruption to tenants.
- 15% felt there was no clear benefit to them, as a landlord.
- 11% said they struggled to access the financial help available, and 8% simply felt they had a lack of time or capacity to project-manage the retrofit process.[15]

These statistics show that uptake of these schemes needs to match the urgent need for them, if policy ambitions to decarbonise the PRS and tackle tenant fuel poverty are to be realised.

Policy Context

In January 2026, the UK Government confirmed its plans to mandate a higher energy efficiency standard in PRS properties. By 2030, **all privately rented properties must achieve a rating of band C or higher** on their Energy Performance Certificate (or else apply for a valid exemption). The UK Government is making other major changes around energy efficiency and the PRS by:

- Implementing the **Renters' Rights Act**, starting from May 1st 2026. This 'most significant shake-up of the rental market in 40 years' is empowering tenants with changes such as **the abolition of Section 21 'no-fault' evictions** and the **limiting of rent increases** to once a year, as well as fairer and clear grounds for landlords wishing to repossess a property, alongside the application of the **Decent Homes** standard and **Awaab's Law** (which introduces legally enforceable timeframes in which landlords must remedy problematic damp and mould).[16]

[11] MHCLG (2025), English Housing Survey 2024-2025
[12] Propertymark (2025), Improving the energy performance of privately rented homes in England and Wales – consultation on Domestic Private Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards: Response from Propertymark
[13] Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2026), Household Energy Efficiency Statistics, headline release: March 2026
[14] Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2026), Great British Insulation Scheme release: January 2026
[15] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Landlord
[16] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025), Guide to the Renters' Rights Act

It also strengthens local authorities' enforcement abilities and will introduce a Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman. These changes should mean tenants in non-compliant properties can more readily make a complaint, and get the issue fixed without fear of retaliatory eviction.

- Rolling out measures as part of the **Warm Homes Plan**. This ambitious outline for upgrading and decarbonising the UK's homes aims to **deliver £15 billion of public investment** to help those living in inefficient properties (including the third or so of the rental population who live in fuel poverty). It includes detailed plans for expanding low-carbon District Heating Systems, training new tradespeople to carry out retrofits, **administering substantial new funding for insulation and solar panels** (via the Warm Homes: Local Plan), and **continuing the Boiler Upgrade Scheme** to financially aid landlords in transitioning their properties away from fossil-fuel heating. Additionally, a new advice service—**the Warm Homes Agency**—will be set up to work with local authorities to provide free and impartial energy advice to households of all tenures.[17]

- Applying the Future Homes Standard to new builds. This requires **all new build homes in England** to be fitted with a **low-carbon heat source** as standard. This includes biomass boilers, ground- or air- source heat pumps, or connections to District Heating Networks. Effectively, this will **eliminate the need for landlords to spend extra money** retrofitting their properties, if those properties were built after a certain date. The necessary features for compliance will already come as standard.

- Releasing a new Fuel Poverty strategy. For rental homes, this strategy includes things like upping the amount landlords need to spend upgrading before they hit a 'cost cap'. Previously capped at £3,500, this sum now moves up to £10,000. A later part of this plan, expected in 2027, **reforming EPCs for greater accuracy**, will also help landlords pinpoint which specific measures they need to install to hit their band C target.[18]

With the PRS undergoing such significant changes, it is important these reforms are informed by a strong understanding of tenants' and landlords' experiences, and the challenges they experience in trying to fund energy-efficiency measures. Insight into how they engage (or do not engage) with existing funding schemes, and what they would like to see maintained or else reformed in future, will give us a valuable understanding of what will genuinely deliver efficient, affordable, healthy, low-carbon homes.

[17] UK Government (2026), Warm Homes Plan
[18] UK Government (2026), The Fuel Poverty Strategy for England

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

This research was designed to complement findings from TDS Charitable Foundation's annual Voice of the Tenant and Voice of the Landlord surveys, and to further explore the challenges that were identified in relation to energy efficiency retrofit. The aim here was to develop greater understanding of why funding and carrying out these retrofits was harder than it seemed (even when government assistance was available).

The study explored several key research questions:

- What are tenants' and landlords' experiences of existing energy efficiency funding schemes?
- What causes lower uptake of these schemes in the PRS, compared to other housing sectors?
- Do certain schemes suit certain types of rental properties more than others, depending on e.g. age, construction, tenancy length, type of tenant, EPC rating?
- What features might a scheme need to have to achieve higher uptake amongst landlords and tenants?
- What other factors drive improvements in energy efficiency in the PRS besides schemes e.g. stronger enforcement of MEES regulations?

Participants

In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted online with 21 tenants, 10 landlords, and 7 stakeholders between November 2025 and February 2026. All tenant and landlord participants had contacted an energy efficiency funding scheme in some capacity, and over half had received a measure (such as double glazing, a new heating system, or insulation) via one of these schemes.

Landlords and tenants

The experiences of those who successfully used the schemes and those who did not are not separated throughout the report. This is because the same barriers applied to both groups. Overcoming them often owed more to chance and circumstance than because any one particular scheme was barrier-free.

Some interviewees also had multiple different experiences with schemes – they may have successfully applied and had measures installed via one scheme, but later also considered applying for another and encountered challenges with it. Similarly, some interviewees who had had a measure installed satisfactorily still had simultaneous critiques of the advertising, application process, or administration of the scheme. Interviewees also widely recognised that other landlords and/or tenants could face challenges with aspects of the schemes, even where they themselves had chanced not to.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders ranged from those studying energy efficiency and housing issues in an academic capacity, to those involved in the delivery and project-management of the schemes, and those involved in related areas like property management.

Recruitment and sampling

Recruitment for tenant participants took place through the TDS tenant newsletter and via social media such as tenant Facebook groups, in November 2025. Recruitment for the landlord study participants took place through the external research agency Face Facts Research (https://facefactsresearch.com/). Recruitment for stakeholders took place via snowball sampling and social networking. The research used purposive sampling to find tenants and landlords in England who had interacted with energy efficiency funding schemes.

Recruitment was confined to those who had contacted funding schemes about physically installing significant heating, insulation, or energy-efficiency measures i.e. measures that would have required substantial changes to the property (see chart of schemes used, below). This research did not recruit participants who only had experience of other types of energy-related initiatives, such as receiving Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers for free energy, or applying for the Warm Homes Discount on energy bills. These were beyond the scope of the project.

The experiences, views, and attitudes that this report captures should not be seen as representative of the entire English PRS. They investigate instead the personal accounts of the small percentage of tenants and landlords who have interacted with energy efficiency schemes.

Participant profile

Participants represented a broad range of demographics (see Appendix). However, due to the voluntary nature of participation, the samples were inherently self-selecting. The demographic spread here broadly reflects the landlord and tenant population in terms of age, ethnicity, sex, and those in receipt of Universal Credit or other benefits.

Previous and current energy efficiency schemes

The following is a summary of the main national energy efficiency schemes that have been open to the PRS in England. Schemes used by one or more interviewees in this study are indicated in blue. This list is as comprehensive as possible, though allowances must be made for those interviewees who were unable to recall the exact name of the scheme they used, or used a small postcode-specific scheme run by their local council instead.

SCHEME NAME	DATE LAUNCHED	DATE CLOSED
Warm Front Programme	June 2000	March 2012
Boiler Scrappage Scheme	January 2010	March 2010
Feed-In Tariff	April 2010	March 2019
Green Deal	January 2013	July 2015
ECO (Energy Company Obligation) 1	January 2013	March 2015
Renewable Heat Incentive	April 2014	March 2022
ECO 2 +HTH	April 2015	March 2017
ECO 3	December 2018	March 2022
Green Homes Grant	September 2020	March 2021
ECO 4	April 2022	March 2026
Boiler Upgrade Scheme/ Clean Heat Grant	May 2022	Present
Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS)	March 2023	March 2026
Home Upgrade Grant	April 2023	March 2025
Warm Homes: Local Grant	Late 2025	Present

CHAPTER THREE

Findings

SUMMARY

This project investigated the barriers and challenges associated with using a funding scheme for energy efficiency retrofit, and the barriers and challenges of retrofit more widely. Issues identified included: problems finding trustworthy information, difficulties understanding Energy Performance Certificates, lack of knowledge about schemes, miscommunication between tenants and landlords, anxieties around rent raises, difficulties finding tradespeople, and other difficulties.

TRUST AND INFORMATION

Mistrust of EPC recommendations

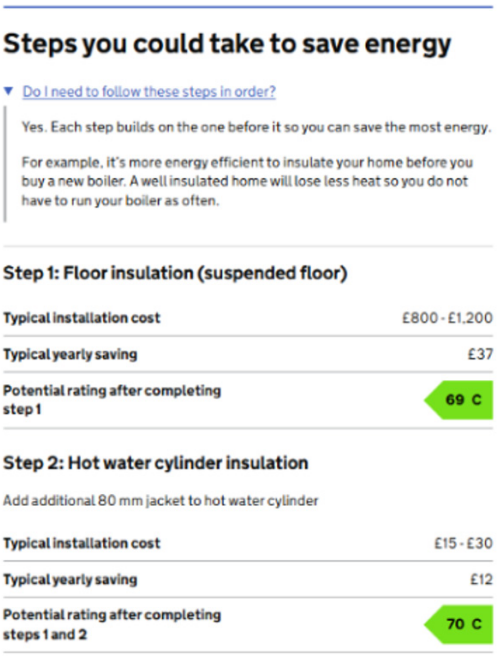
Mistrust of EPC recommendations was identified as a key barrier to using energy efficiency schemes and making property improvements. Landlords may doubt whether paying for energy efficiency improvements will result in measurable changes. As one landlord said, when asked whether their cavity wall insulation and replacement boiler retrofit had made the property easier to heat:

"It's quite hard to tell actually, because there wasn't any real complaints before and there wasn't any complaints afterwards?"

Several other landlords echoed this. Currently, they felt, **the steps required to get a lower band property up into the desired band C were unclear**. One landlord interviewee described how they felt the current EPC recommendations should change:

"[It should be] more definitive. So, say for example, 'if you go with this scheme and you install this type of source, we can guarantee you that your property will be a band C'. Rather than it being like, 'oh, get this heat source and then once we've done it, we'll do an assessment and see what bands you come in and where you're at.' Because at the time you're, you're doing all of this that you think...'It's a gamble. Well, am I going to be a C? Am I going to be a D? I don't know!'

For landlords, **the current layout of the EPC's recommendations section was a problem.** The numerical points each measure earns are often presented cumulatively, not individually (or in some versions downloaded from an online source, not presented at all). The intention with this design - with each connected measure building on the previous one – is often to show how a deep retrofit can save the maximum amount of energy. It assumes that most people reading the certificate will wish to carry out most or all measures. And that they will do them in the order recommended - a 'fabric-first' approach.



Steps you could take to save energy

▼ Do I need to follow these steps in order?

Yes. Each step builds on the one before it so you can save the most energy.

For example, it's more energy efficient to insulate your home before you buy a new boiler. A well insulated home will lose less heat so you do not have to run your boiler as often.

Step 1: Floor insulation (suspended floor)

Typical installation cost	£800 - £1,200
Typical yearly saving	£37
Potential rating after completing step 1	69 C

Step 2: Hot water cylinder insulation

Add additional 80 mm jacket to hot water cylinder

Typical installation cost	£15 - £30
Typical yearly saving	£12
Potential rating after completing steps 1 and 2	70 C

The problem, as the interview data indicated, was that landlords were not generally looking to save the maximum possible energy. They were looking to achieve basic compliance.

And whilst the design's original intention might have been to encourage a deep and holistic retrofit, and discourage cherry-picking of just the cheapest measures, in practice it was not having this effect. In practice, **landlords who felt confused about which measures would achieve which EPC score** were not landlords who then optimistically carried out all the measures. They were landlords who **took no action at all**. Or, if they did take action and it did not create the anticipated EPC change, they simply became frustrated and less inclined to comply going forwards.

The related issue is that on EPCs there is often **no obvious correlation between the order the measures are recommended in, their relative expense, and their relative difficulty to install**.

Consequently, some landlords seem to mis-read an EPC's multiple recommendations section as saying the only way for their band D property to reach C is to install a measure that is particularly complicated, expensive, or with a long-term payoff period. When actually, the certificate may say that meaningful energy improvements – enough to significantly improve tenant comfort and reach a high band C score – can be straightforwardly done. This can be true even where the tenant wants minimal disruption and the budget is small (e.g. via things like deepening loft insulation to a dense 300mm, ensuring all lightbulbs are LED, or self-installing a DIY secondary glazing kit). Landlords felt this point was not clear. **Although the EPC told them roughly how much each individual measure would cost, it did not clarify which of the measures would achieve their aims.**

This is not to say that landlords and tenants should ever be discouraged from retrofitting beyond the bare minimum. Aiming for an EPC rating as high as possible is always an excellent goal. **However, landlords should be able to install a measure with a reasonable awareness of how it affects the EPC**, not with guesswork and confusion.

Mistrust of EPC ratings

Alongside the perceived unreliability of EPC recommendations was a **mistrust of the EPC ratings themselves.**

"It's a weird one, is that, because you get a rating and it's not always strictly true, is it?" said one landlord, when asked about their properties' EPC bands.



CASE STUDY ONE

One landlord spoke of their confusion at two of their properties being awarded surprisingly low EPCs.

The first was a property they themselves had lived in and found easy to heat, and which was constructed in a style common to the north of England during the 19th-century. The back-to-back terraced house shared three walls with the surrounding houses. This strongly limited opportunities for heat to escape, and its large south-facing front window ensured significant solar gain. However, because the 'terraced' classification did not have any distinctions within that, the scoring appeared to assume a large uninsulated area of solid wall at the back. This might have affected its ultimate score.

The second property was a recent barn conversion with a maximum thickness of wall, ceiling, and underfloor insulation. It had new double glazing and an underfloor heating system with air-source heat pump. It too had been awarded a surprisingly low EPC, for a modern conversion heated entirely with renewable energy.

In both cases, a lack of nuance in the scoring system did seem to have caused a genuine inaccuracy.

Plausibly, **these properties could be cosy to live in - just not on paper.** This landlord gave the clearest example of this, but several other landlords and tenants mentioned encountering seemingly unreliable EPCs.



One landlord described how limitations in the EPC assessment process led to what they felt was an inaccurate rating:

"We've got a biomass boiler...which is one of the most efficient heating systems and he [the assessor] couldn't find it on his list. So, he had to downgrade the property... I queried it and [he] was like, 'Well, that's, you know it's public record now. So, there's nothing I can do about it.' And I'm like 'Well, that's really you know not fair!'"

Currently, a degree of landlord and tenant mistrust in EPCs is undermining the willingness to improve rental homes

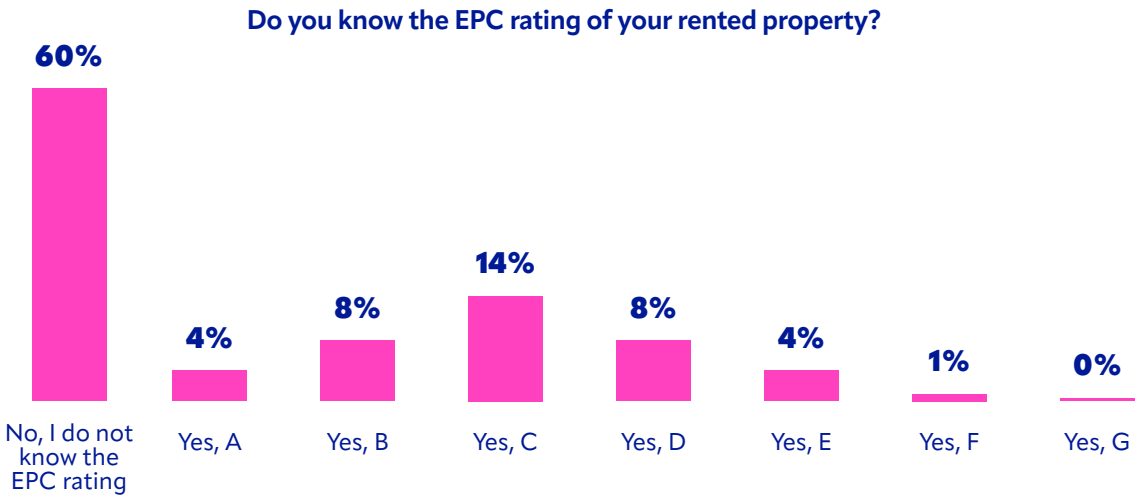


Several stakeholders expressed hopes that the June 2025 reforms to the EPC metrics (the RdSAP 10) and the upcoming 2027 switch to the Home Energy Model would improve their accuracy. This is a welcome reform. **And as EPC scores can be the deciding factor in eligibility for many energy efficiency schemes, it is important that these be accurate and trustworthy.** The exact date for implementation of these reforms is still to be confirmed.

Low tenant awareness and understanding of EPCs

Compounding the landlord mistrust in EPCs is their **confusion over whether tenants really know or care about these documents anyway.** This theme emerged in the interview data, with the majority of tenants initially giving responses like *"I think I've got one [an EPC] somewhere, but I don't know what it is,"* though some did remember the EPC band during the interview, or offered to search for the document. A few tenants said they **had not been given an EPC** at the start of their tenancy, even though this is a legal requirement.

This finding is backed up by statistical data. In the 2025 Voice of the Tenant survey, only 58% of tenants said they recall being given an EPC certificate at the start of their tenancy. A further 15% were unsure. However, as this figure does not necessarily match the percentages of landlords who provide EPCs to tenants, it may instead show that the large volume of paperwork handed out (during the potentially already stressful period of moving house) is too overwhelming to recall exactly what is received. Whatever the underlying reason, the net result is that **many tenants remain unaware of their EPCs**. Again, this is statistically verified. 60% of tenants (in the same survey) said they did not know their home's EPC rating.[19]



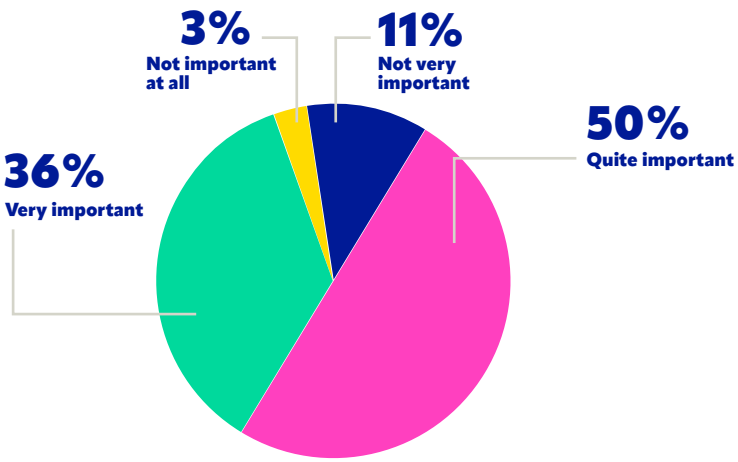
Likewise, data from Rightmove found a similar 63% of renters did not know their property's EPC (although they were not alone in this, with 50% of owner-occupiers not knowing this either). **Tenants often show limited formal awareness of related legislation around energy efficiency.** [20]

However, for landlords to draw the conclusion that tenants do not care about energy efficiency of their homes would be **entirely wrong**. This mistaken belief was suggested several times in the interviews. And it can disincentivise landlords from applying to schemes or upgrading in general: if the tenants do not appear to mind whether their property is cold, why go to the trouble of improving a Band F property up to a Band D?

In fact, the interview data shows **tenants care very much**. They are just unlikely to use technical language, formal measurements, or reference to official documentation to describe it. They measure energy efficiency via their real-world experiences of warmth, comfort, good health, and bill-paying instead. Statistical data also supports this finding. The 2025 Voice of the Tenant survey found that **86% of tenants actually consider energy efficiency quite or very important**. [21][22]

[19] Harris, J. and Smith, A..TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Living in the Private Rented Sector in 2025: Voice of the Tenant Survey (Wave 5)
[20] Rightmove (2025), Greener Homes Report 2025
[21] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Tenant
[22] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Tenant

How important is energy efficiency to you when choosing a rental property?



Challenges identifying schemes

Near-universally, **tenants and landlords could not name any schemes besides the one they had used.** Often, **they could not name the scheme they had used either.**

Instead, most described a leaflet, a word-of-mouth recommendation, an online advert, or the council alerting them that funding existed. Those who pro-actively searched for schemes generally described a process of Googling until they found the first scheme that did not seem to be a scam. This low awareness of named schemes is only partially explained by the advertising for some schemes (e.g. the ECO) tending not to use the actual acronym.

Although many landlords and tenants do care about meeting MEES regulations, requiring them to do unassisted in-depth research to find and choose between multiple schemes is rarely feasible. And many tenants had **additional barriers to researching different schemes, such as chronic disabilities to manage, lengthy work/ study hours, or a language barrier.**

Statistical evidence supports this finding. One recent study found that 93% of landlords had never heard of the ECO or HUG (Home Upgrade Grant) schemes.[23] Similarly, a 2025 Propertymark survey found that landlords simply not being aware of funding schemes was **the most common reason given for not applying** to them. [24] [25]

Diversity amongst the landlord population

Appreciating the diversity in the landlord population is important when considering uptake of schemes. **Landlords who were most likely to have heard of and/or used multiple schemes tended to be those with larger portfolios**. Although these landlords found the task of staying up-to-date with all possible schemes time-consuming, they either worked full-time managing their properties and/or had significant help from letting or estate agents.

One such landlord, with a property portfolio of 40+ homes, had used an energy-efficiency scheme to get cavity wall insulation at their own residence, and described how this assistance worked:

"Typically I rely on my estate agents because I, because I've got like a full time job and the property stuff, it takes a lot of time...they're usually good at being on the front foot to try and get us funding and reduce our kind of cost outlay where possible. And we tend to give them a financial incentive for it. If they get us a boiler then that will probably save us a couple of [quid]...we're more than happy to chuck them £500 just as a bit of a thank you."

[23] Citizens Advice (2023), Room for Improvement: Preparing landlords for new minimum energy efficiency standards
[24] Ibid.
[25] Propertymark (2025), Consultation response on Domestic Private Rented Sector MEES

This highlights the valuable role that letting and estate agencies can play in keeping landlords and property buyers aware of these schemes.

Trusting word-of-mouth recommendations over official advertising

This study also found relational and **word-of-mouth recommendations played a significant role** in tenants' use of energy efficiency schemes.[26] A personal recommendation from a friend, neighbour, or relative was often considered more trustworthy than an online advert or a leaflet. Particularly for the ECO scheme, clusters of applicants could be found in particular communities or networks. One tenant, part of a community for citizens from abroad currently living in the UK, explained:

"I actually joined [the ECO scheme] through an African organisation...I have some African-Caribbean brothers and some Black African brothers that actually are using it for quite long. So they gave me the information about it....through a word-of-mouth."

This finding echoes one from the UK Energy Research Centre, which discovered a similar community effect amongst ECO applications from Asian communities living nearby one another in West Yorkshire.[27]

Lack of advertising

Virtually **none of the interviewees thought that energy efficiency schemes were well-advertised in general**. However, a couple of landlords had words of praise for specific property-centric mailing lists their individual local councils had set up, which did notify them about these.

Other interviewees felt there were **missed opportunities for advertising**. One wanted to see more schemes advertised on social media, and another (who had had a positive experience at her GP's with a 'social prescriber') saying that **community and public services spaces such as doctors' surgeries ought to advertise these things:**

"Because elderly people and people who aren't well spend a lot of time at the doctors....you sit there and, you know, all those posters. And that would be a really informative place to put it. And even like leaflets that doctors can hand out."

This tenant also reflected that such advertising ought to try and reach the elderly and the **digitally excluded** rather than being **online-only**, as these were often people in serious fuel poverty.

There was no clear consensus on whether advertising should target the landlord or the tenant. Some landlords specifically felt that tenants were liable to mistake scheme advertising for junk mail, and simply bin leaflets posted through the door. However, there is a potential miscommunication here. **The interview data indicated that some tenants might (correctly or incorrectly) believe that their landlord wishes them to be a 'good' tenant by not troubling them with such things.**

However, **one notable caveat** (from a stakeholder involved in managing energy efficiency schemes) was that since the more grant-based Warm Homes: Local Grants had recently been rolled out, landlords had shown markedly greater interest – **without any extra advertising. This finding may indicate that, in cases where funding is grant-based and substantial or there is a clear legislative deadline to meet, these factors can contribute to higher uptake in the PRS.**

[26] Mininni, G. M., Brown, D., Brisbois, M. C., Middlemiss, L., Davis, M., Cairns, I., Hannon, M., Bookbinder, R., and Owen, A. (2024), Landlords' accounts of retrofit: A relational approach in the private rented sector in England. Energy Research and Social Science, vol. 118 (December 2024), 103742
[27] UK Energy Research Centre (2024), 'Who Applies for Energy Grants?'

Problems with unanswered questions

Unanswered questions about schemes tended to focus on the measures themselves, or the specific terms and financial features of the schemes. They were not usually about the rationale behind efficiency measures i.e. meeting the MEES regulations.

Landlords and tenants already generally understood that a quick Google or ChatGPT query would produce volumes of online information about, for example, types of insulation. This was not the problem. The issue is that the **large cost and other major implications of a full retrofit mean generalized advice is not always enough**. Nonspecific answers can fall short. Landlords and tenants need to feel sure before proceeding with a scheme.

Linked to this, **a consistent source of frustration amongst interviewees who did not go ahead and apply was schemes with one-size-fits-all approaches** (see Case study two).

CASE STUDY TWO

A landlord with a Victorian property was told their tenant could be eligible for a replacement boiler scheme, but only if they had cavity wall insulation installed. The property did not have any cavity walls.

"We had to make all these other upgrades, which were just not applicable for this property. So, for example we needed the cavity insulation...but that's not how those houses are designed. They need houses need to breathe. [They said] unless you do this, you can't have the boiler."

This illustrates how lack of flexibility within the schemes and the rigid application of a "one-size-fits all" approach can act as a barrier to drawing on the funding and completing works.

Case study three also illustrates that **when tenants or landlords cannot get specific answers to their retrofit queries, this can halt their progress with a scheme entirely**. It demonstrates that where concerns about a measure already exist (e.g. related to cost), **a lack of impartial, personalised, free information can be a deal-breaker.**

CASE STUDY THREE

One tenant, who had an expensive electric-only heating system, had contacted their energy supplier (which also offered various deals on renewable technologies) for a solar panels quote. When asked why their landlord had rejected this request, they said it was partially the expense,

"but also the practicalities of it, just because the house is quite old. So, if you're installing it on top and like, if it's long-lasting too, because if the house is old and if the roof, that we need to replace it. It's like: 'I've got that installed now, how would I move it'?"

This a common concern for those considering solar P.V. panels. But there are well-established practical procedures for removing and replacing the panels. Advice could have been given on this point, as well as on the best times to replace older roofing.

A statement on the Energy Saving Trust website supports the findings here:
"Our experience delivering Home Energy Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government shows that tailored, trusted advice is what gives people the confidence to act. Evaluation data shows 42% of people go on to install energy saving or low carbon measures after receiving advice and a further 42% plan to do so within a year."

Difficulties using installers as the sole source of advice

Directing these questions to the tradespeople looking to install the renewables, insulation or other measures might be an alternative avenue. However, the interview data found two problems with this.

Firstly, landlords had consistent difficulty engaging reliable and qualified tradespeople (the failure of schemes such as the Green Homes Grant is attributed partly to this problem).[28] They may struggle to consult with busy tradespeople even whilst still at the stage of gathering quotes and deciding upon different retrofit options.

Secondly, with newer technologies like air source heat pumps, there is **no guarantee that all tradespeople will have adequate experience with them** yet either. This was highlighted by a landlord who gave serious consideration to installing either air- or ground- source heat pumps at a property:

"The thing that put me off and I didn't go with it in the end...I spoke to a couple of companies and I was asking questions with regards to cost and how it's serviced and all of this. And the people selling it or trying to sell it just didn't seem to know the answers!"

This is compounded by the natural issue that installers may be assumed to be 'selling something' in all interactions, even where they are trying to advise impartially.

Miscommunication or missing information about eligibility

The matter of landlord-tenant miscommunication or **lack of understanding over scheme eligibility was a theme that arose several times.** Often, landlords prioritised tenant privacy. As earlier studies have discovered, this is a challenge in schemes based on tenant eligibility.[29]

Stakeholders described situations where this miscommunication had caused problems:

"There's been quite a lot of people who have applied and then realised that a tenant is not eligible...we've had someone apply and say like, 'oh, you know, they're definitely below £36,000.' And then we checked and they were just over it, unfortunately...And I think another time where they've said like, 'oh, they're definitely on benefits.' And they, I don't know if they necessarily were."

Some landlords did not feel it was **socially appropriate** to inquire about some grounds for eligibility, which could be quite personal – a tenant's age, or whether they had a disability, or how much they earned. One researcher in fuel poverty, who was also a landlord, believed that:

"Those third parties [services such as Citizens Advice and other energy advisers] are better places to do that kind of work. I don't think we should be forcing a relationship between the landlord and the tenant. And, it's quite intrusive, isn't it? Why should the landlord be privy to financial information?"

[28] National Audit Office & Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2021), Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme: Report
[29] National Retrofit Hub & Impact on Urban Health (2025), Raising standards in the private rental sector

Lack of awareness of MEES exemptions

Awareness that official MEES exemptions existed were low. This acted as a barrier. Where landlords had multiple properties, some of which could not be exempted and some which could, landlords struggled to accurately budget for retrofit. Unaware of the low-cost exemption for properties valued at very little, they felt they were being asked to spend equally large sums on every property they owned. **This gave them an unrealistic idea of the total costs, which prevented them taking action.**

Equally some mistakenly believed that no exemptions existed for traditional properties with trickier constructions. Others believed the Government had placed them in an impossible position through being asked to either install unsuitable measures and risk damage to their traditional properties (which might cost money to remedy), or else to break the law. For some, the net results were confusion, unhappiness with the entire concept of energy efficiency, disinclination to comply, and feelings of victimization. The few landlords who knew about the MEES exemptions generally spoke of them approvingly. Exempting a particular traditional property from installing solar panels because it was known to have weaker, older roofing that would not support the weight, for example, was perceived as common-sense.

It is true some expert bodies do caution against over-use of these exemptions - the National Retrofit Hub argues against them being used to compensate for other weaknesses in the retrofit field, such as exempting a property on grounds that solar panels will lower its market value, through poor awareness that these actually tend to raise market value.[30] However, having **poor awareness that the MEES exemptions are there, to be used in appropriate circumstances, also holds tenants and landlords back.**

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Tenant fears of rent increases

A common theme in the tenant interviews was a fear of rent increases, which acted as a deterrent to engaging with schemes.

The table below shows how rent changed for the 18 tenants and landlords in this study who received measures via an energy efficiency scheme.

DID THE RENT INCREASE AFTER ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES WERE INSTALLED?				
	RENT RAISED, DIRECTLY DUE TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES	RENT RAISED, BUT NOT DIRECTLY STATED AS DUE TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES	RENT NOT RAISED	TOTAL
Tenants	2	6	4	12
Landlords	2	0	4	6
				=18

This brief chart is based on too small a number to make England-wide generalizations from, but it gives some indication of interviewees' situations.

[30] National Retrofit Hub (2025), Improving health and housing outcomes in the private rental sector: Minimum energy efficiency standards and a pathway to affordable, healthy and robust homes

The finding indicates that **whilst rent raises after installing measures were common, rent levels were often increased in response to multiple factors**. And some landlords did not raise rent levels at all. Arguably, these findings have been somewhat affected by the 2022 – 2026 time-period being a time of marked rent increases and cost-of-living crisis (most of the energy efficiency measures had been installed within this period). It should also be noted that in at least one case here, the tenant was the one who paid the customer contribution costs for the measures, not the landlord. Raising the rent in this case, given the landlord had not paid for anything, might have been seen as particularly unjust.

Landlords were **generally the only group** who believed **directly increasing rents** was an appropriate response to installing efficiency measures.

However, **contrary to the stereotype of an adversarial landlord-tenant relationship**, a small number of tenants were sympathetic to landlords' decisions. In their understanding, they said, their landlords were running a business and therefore (within reason) a general rent increase was justified due to the economic climate. One tenant wished to be clear that their interview responses were not an attack on their own landlord, and expressed understanding for the costs of maintenance and upgrading:

"I'll say today, anything here is not a criticism of the landlady. I actually feel for the woman... It's a business investment. Yes, she told me the other day what she spent on one of her houses this year...for the landlady, it's a very challenging world, I would imagine."

Stakeholders, on the other hand, tended to see rent raises for efficiency measures as entirely inappropriate:

"Obviously straightforward energy efficiency improvements don't generally, certainly in my experience, deliver any return. Because you can't charge extra rent just because you've, you know, it improved, you know, the insulation or whatever. That's not, you know, right."

"You shouldn't be charging tenants more to have a property which is meeting current regulations.... you can't charge me more for hitting what you need to do legally. It's just, that's just stupid."

Stakeholders involved in running schemes sometimes expressed frustration around **tenants ending up too concerned about unaffordable rent raises to engage constructively with schemes.** This proved a genuine barrier. When installers needed access to the property, and when good communication was needed between the landlord, the tenant, and the scheme co-ordinators, this lack of reassurance about rent increases could halt progress:

"I see all the adverts for it, but it doesn't tell you where you stand as a private tenant? Because obviously I want this home to be better. But at the same time, I don't want them to go, 'Oh yeah, by the way, we're putting this in for free' which I've gone off my back and got, yeah? And then they're going to say to me, 'Well, actually now we're going to charge more rent for it.' Because that's not fair."

Existing data shows that rent raises are the most **common fear** cited by tenants for why they do not ask about energy efficiency improvements. 36% of tenants who felt their property needed energy efficiency improvements avoided asking due to worries their rent would be increased.[31]

Perceptions of fairness in scheme eligibility

Where tenants lived in poorly maintained properties, this in turn caused them to question the legitimacy of the schemes. In these cases, tenants felt that public money should not be used to support landlords who were not meeting basic standards of property maintenance.

[31] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Tenant

CASE STUDY FOUR

A tenant with disabilities who participated in this study also had young children with health conditions which were worsened by cold, damp, and mould. The property suffered from numerous problems including broken radiators, a leaking roof that caused extensive mould, an inaccessible energy meter, and window frames so damaged that the curtains moved in breezy weather. One child had previously been hospitalised with asthma issues, and the doctors had cited the home's dampness as a contributing factor.

The tenant described how rent raises (actual and prospective) affected their situation:

"The problem was my husband was friends with the landlord. So, we got a deal on our rent...my husband left, my rent went up as soon as he left, which they said it wasn't a coincidence, but that's funny. [The tenant contacted their landlord about a free loft insulation scheme] And I obviously mentioned before about the wind coming in through the front door, and obviously that chills the front room out. So, this is where we're sitting, where the children are playing, where we're eating, and it's cold. So, it's hard. But then I said at the same time, like, I don't want him to be like, 'Oh, yeah, we're going to do that, and now your rent's going to go up by 200 quid'. It's my biggest fear."



Two tenants in the study, both on low incomes and living with serious health conditions, described particularly poor housing conditions (see case study four). Experiences like these shaped perceptions of funding schemes. These tenants' willingness to engage with them was affected, due to their questioning why certain landlords should be eligible for government support when minimum standards were not being met:

"If you're going to rent a property, surely it's your duty to make it like that [energy efficient] anyway?...And [the landlord] sat here several years ago and said 'I can't really get much more money, otherwise I'll be in the super tax bracket and I don't want to do that'. And I was like 'I can't believe you're sitting here saying that'. Knowing how much we were struggling".

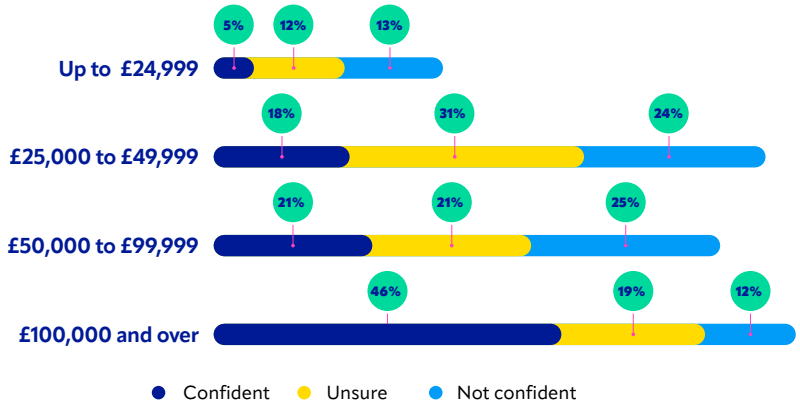
Cost barriers

Cost was often cited as the greatest challenge and a clear deterrent to using schemes that were anything other than a full-cost grant. **Concerns about additional or hidden costs deterred some, but not all landlords from applying for schemes**, and from completing retrofit work in general. Existing data shows that landlords who felt the most confident about hitting the new MEES targets were, unsurprisingly, those on higher incomes.[32]

In the interviews, this was evident from a few landlords (usually those with larger portfolios) with a relaxed, business-as-usual attitude to upgrading properties. They seemed to consider energy efficiency improvements in the same category as any other repairs or upgrades. Consequently, **they did not view the new MEES regulations as financially concerning**. For them, giving a property a makeover immediately upon acquisition was normal. Setting aside a portion of rental income for re-investing back into the business, in the form of property improvements, was part of their business model.

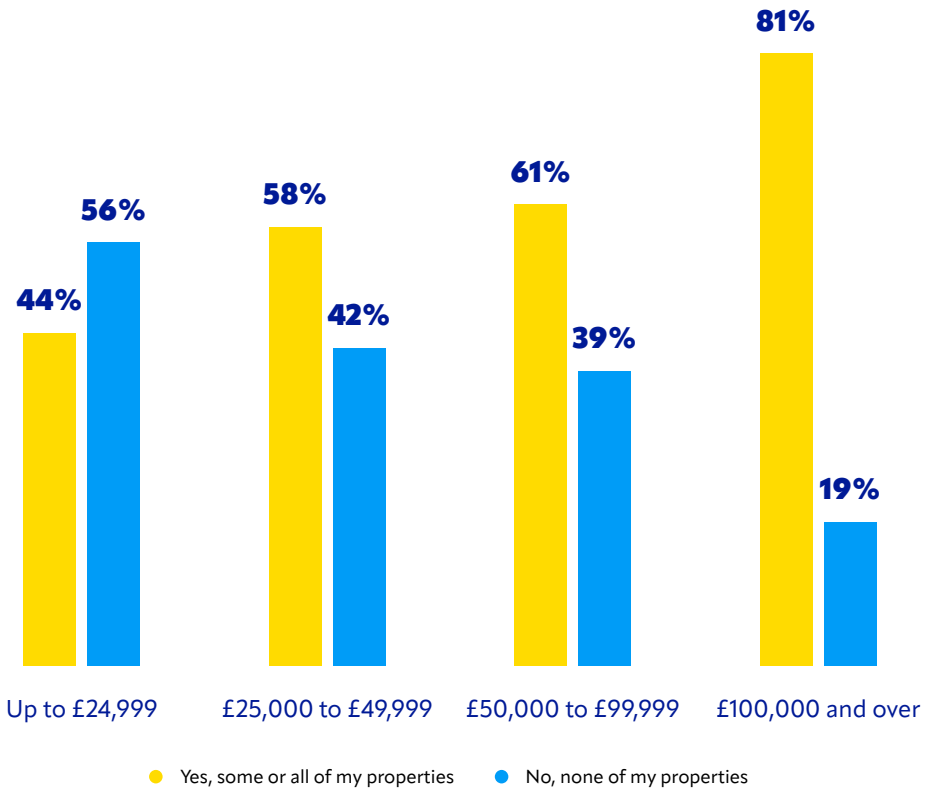
[32] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Landlord

Landlords' household income vs confidence in ability to meet new energy efficiency standards



Data from the same source also showed that landlord income was strongly correlated with having made some energy efficiency improvements already:

Household income and whether a landlord has already improved the energy efficiency of their properties



Figures from the same source show that although landlords' profits overall have grown over the last few years (despite higher taxes), landlords' annual incomes range widely.[33] Whilst their **average income skews higher than the UK average**, this figure masks a small group of landlords (7% of them) on **very low incomes - under £24,999.** A further small group of landlords are on low-ish incomes under the £36,000 eligibility threshold for the Warm

[33] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Landlord

Homes: Local Grant.

For this small group of low-income landlords, fears of hidden costs in the 'small print' of a scheme's terms and conditions, or of simply not having enough savings to cover a customer contribution, are significant barriers.

The data suggests that whilst many landlords can meet the MEES regulations without needing any funding schemes, some cannot. **Some landlords are living on low incomes whilst letting to tenants also living on low incomes**. Stakeholders suggested that to combat fuel poverty effectively, schemes should target these properties with the least financial resources:

"You don't want it to go to where the landlords are really well off and could afford to do it and just has chosen not to. And then gets a free ride off the government. What you want it to go to is, yes, where the tenant's in fuel poverty - but also where the landlord otherwise couldn't afford to do so. So, you want to find poorer landlords who have poorer tenants."

SCHEME DESIGN AND ACCESS

Technical challenges

Once someone had decided to go ahead with a scheme, technical challenges around getting the insulation or heating systems installed were rare. Only two tenants reported such technical problems. In fact, most of the 18 participants who had installed measures spoke approvingly of tradespeople doing a quick, expert, fuss-free job at their properties. *"I think it's just been really good...you haven't had to pay any money for it. So yeah, I think it's brilliant what they're doing,"* said one typical approving tenant.

Concerns over quality of measures installed

A minority of landlords and tenants also worry about the quality of the measures installed via energy efficiency schemes, which in some cases affected confidence in both the schemes themselves and the wider retrofit process. The recent scandal over the ECO4 was mentioned by a few interviewees, after it was found that an estimated 98% of homes which had had external wall insulation installed had major issues needing remediation. Overall, 6% of these homes were estimated to present immediate health and safety risks.[34] Naturally, this did not instil confidence.

There were virtually no positive remarks from any landlord or tenant interviewed regarding heat pumps. Including from the one landlord who had installed one:

"It's a big horrible thing. I hate it. I hate that. It's, oh, it's a nightmare. It's dead noisy. It's blooming expensive to run as well...Yes, technically, it might be more eco than the gas or whatever, but..."

Despite evidence showing **81% of people who have heat pumps installed are as satisfied with them as their previous heating system, these negative popular perceptions of heat pumps remain**.[35] They partially explain why "to put it mildly, the government's heat pump rollout is not going to plan".[36]

On a related note, one landlord was concerned about schemes offering poor quality brands of measures. They wished to see schemes advertising more freely that the measures available would be from respected manufacturers:

"Would I want that boiler? Is it, is it going to be a decent one? Is it going to be you know, like a Baxi, you know, something that's a proper good quality one or is it just a, a really crappy one?...I think a bigger amount of information, more specific, and you know, like 'You can have a Baxi boiler free, if you meet this criteria'."

However, it is important to note that negativity about certain measures was, in the majority of cases, based on personal taste or on media reports about other homes, not on actual experiences with defective measures. Only two tenants reported a faulty installation experience. One reported polystyrene-ball cavity wall insulation escaping into their home and garden:

[34] National Audit Office & Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2025), Energy efficiency installations under the Energy Company Obligation
[35]Nesta (2023), 'Heat pumps get thumbs up from British owners across all property types in first major survey'
[36] Resolution Foundation & European Climate Foundation (2025), No Country for Cold Homes: Key considerations for the Warm Homes Plan

"It was all coming through into the boiler. It was awful. And then there was holes that they drilled outside in the brickwork and they never filled all of them in".

The second tenant described ongoing issues with new heaters. The exact nature of these, they understandably could not describe, because "I'm not a tech person", though it involved multiple breakages, parts 'falling off' and repeated calls back to the installer to re-install malfunctioning parts.

Concerns around retrofitting traditional buildings

Worries about destroying the character of older or unusually-constructed properties were expressed by both tenants and landlords. Some interviewees mentioned tenants who valued the aesthetic qualities of quirky traditional homes, as well as their relative affordability. These tenants sometimes saw **higher fuel costs as a trade-off for these desirable features**. One stakeholder described trying (unsuccessfully) to extend and retrofit several characterful cottage properties:

"We came up with a whole scheme to extend…open it up downstairs, put heat source, air source heat pumps in, improve the energy efficiency... And the overwhelming response from all of the tenants: 'We don't want it. We want to live in our little cold two-bed boxes!'. And we're like 'OK, that's not actually the response we were expecting!" What I think I read between the lines is 'We don't want to pay any more rent, we chose these because they are, you know, you know, £900, £1000 a month.'"

They explained further: *"People fall in love with [our] properties... they come into it wanting a really nice, you know, high energy efficiency, but then they see the cottage and really like it. And the fact that it's got a [low] EPC rating suddenly goes out the window."*

Amongst landlords and tenants, misconceptions around retrofitting traditional buildings also existed. These included the false beliefs that adding insulation or renewables was:

- Physically impossible
- Inevitably going to cause physical damage to the property
- Pointless – old buildings were simply supposed to feel cold
- Universally considered un-aesthetic and would ruin the property's character

In fact, **techniques do exist for sensitively and appropriately adding efficiency measures to traditional buildings.** However, they might require specialist materials and expertise (potentially making these retrofits more complex or costly), and there might be a smaller number of appropriate measures than for a modern property. Whilst scoring in band A is genuinely unattainable for most of these buildings, a band C score may be more feasible than many interviewees seemed to realise.

A growing number of pre-1919 'demonstrator' properties provide in-situ evidence of energy efficiency successes, such as Glasgow's Niddrie Road tenement retrofit and York's Vine Street Victorian council home retrofits.[37][38]

Written guidance from professional bodies such as Historic Environment Scotland explains how it is often possible to preserve the original character of period features whilst keeping heat in. For example, retaining a Victorian look by adding secondary glazing to sash windows and returning their old painted-up wooden shutters to use. Natural insulating materials such as hemp, wool, or cellulose can often be used instead of synthetic ones, as these 'vapour-permeable' materials allow moist air to pass through, just as the building was originally designed to do. This prevents a buildup of damp and mould.

[37]Loco Home Retrofit & Under One Roof (2024), Whole Tenement Retrofit Case Study
[38] Green Open Homes Network (Accessed 30 March 2026), 'Thatched cottage, Tisbury'

None of this is to argue against prioritizing the 'easy wins'. Stakeholders working in retrofit still favoured prioritizing tenants in easy-to-insulate 1950's/1960's postwar cavity-wall construction homes. However, landlords and tenants still need to know that there are retrofit possibilities beyond the most straightforward construction types.

Interview data showed that **being unaware of these possibilities prevented those with traditional properties from engaging with schemes. It also showed that enquiring with schemes tended to do little to correct these assumptions**. With a few exceptions, traditional properties with more complex needs were sometimes excluded from schemes in favour of dealing with only the most straightforward construction types. This resulted in landlord and tenant inquirers falsely believing nothing at all could be done to retrofit such properties.

Difficulties finding installers

Landlords also faced practical barriers around the construction workforce. **Many reported difficulties finding reliable tradespeople:**

"Contractor availability has become a lot more challenging in recent years. So, I guess, naturally, let's say we haven't implemented many of these energy-efficiency repair works... actually getting contractors, engaged, quoting and to do work is harder than it was five or ten years ago."

Earlier schemes such as the Green Homes Grant struggled for this reason. Accreditation requirements, administrative burdens, and short program timescales discouraged many installers from participating - the certifications required of installers to participate in the scheme were considered too burdensome.[39] This resulted in far too few tradespersons for the number of participating households.

The interview data showed that landlords often preferred to use their own trusted tradespeople, even if this potentially meant using someone without the right qualifications for the task in hand. However, these concerns and preferences should not justify lowering professional standards. Rather, they highlight the need for expanded training opportunities, apprenticeships, and accessible certification pathways to increase the number of qualified retrofit professionals.



[39] NAO & BEIS (2021), Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme

CHAPTER FOUR

Improving Scheme Design and Delivery

SUMMARY

Drawing on their experiences, participants identified several ways in which energy efficiency schemes could be improved. These insights highlight how scheme design and delivery could increase uptake and address the barriers identified in the previous chapter.

Simplicity and clarity of scheme design

Participants highlighted the importance of simplicity in encouraging engagement with energy efficiency schemes. Schemes with multiple pathways, unclear eligibility criteria, or overly technical language were seen as more difficult to engage with. In contrast, simpler approaches—offering a limited number of clearly defined options, with straightforward messaging and minimal administrative burden—were viewed more positively.

Overall, **participants responded well to schemes that were easy to understand, required minimal effort to engage with, and clearly set out what support was available and what outcomes could be expected**. These findings suggest that prioritising clarity and simplicity in scheme design may help to improve accessibility and uptake.

Improving awareness and communication of schemes

Low awareness of energy efficiency schemes was a consistent barrier across participants. Many relied on word-of-mouth or came across schemes by chance, rather than through targeted communication. **Improving visibility through trusted channels—including local authorities, community networks, and frontline services—could increase engagement**. Communication should also be tailored to reach groups who are less likely to engage with digital advertising. Any awareness-raising initiatives should be timed carefully, so as not to draw attention away from any existing tenant education programmes around the Renters' Rights Act. Timing energy efficiency scheme advertising for an autumn period, as the colder weather arrives and the public's thoughts turn towards heating their homes for the winter, could work particularly well.

Flexibility for different property types

Participants highlighted the need **for schemes to better accommodate a wider range of property types, particularly older and traditionally constructed buildings**. One-size-fits-all eligibility criteria and requirements were often seen as impractical, preventing otherwise suitable properties from accessing support. Greater flexibility in the measures available, alongside access to tailored technical advice, would help ensure that more complex properties are not excluded.

Improving trust in EPCs and guidance

Improving the clarity and reliability of EPC recommendations is also important. Participants highlighted the need for clearer guidance on which measures are required to reach specific EPC bands. More transparent and actionable recommendations could increase confidence and support more informed decision-making.

Dedicated energy advice services

Participants highlighted the benefits of energy advice services:

"[I had to] make concessions with the landlord on how we will go about the improvement. And he was quite skeptical initially because he didn't want something that would affect the value of the property, in case I eventually want to move out. So, they [the advisors] actually... approached the landlord on my behalf, and he gave them consent for the improvement. And then we talked about the benefits of that."

These services can also play an important role in **bridging communication gaps between landlords and tenants, particularly where eligibility criteria or personal information create barriers to direct engagement**.

Participants also called for **more information, in the form of better tenant education and awareness of their rights to help overcome challenges related to eligibility miscommunications between landlords and tenants**, and helping tenants to know their rights around EPCs and energy issues.

One-stop shop models

One-stop shops, where the information on funding schemes is available alongside tailored technical advice on retrofit measures, often receive positive feedback (for example, the in-person Let Zero energy efficiency cafes in South Yorkshire).[40] These models are preferable to requiring landlords to contact too many different parties, particularly given the number of different roles involved in retrofit processes. Bringing these elements together can help reduce drop-out rates.

This is why the Government's announcement about setting up the Warm Homes Agency advice service is so welcome. Ensuring this new Warm Homes Agency has a joined-up role with the Warm Homes funding and the Boiler Upgrade Scheme administration should now be a key priority.

Views on alternative financial incentives

Near-universally popular amongst all interviewees was the idea of alternative financial incentives, like tax breaks or 'green' mortgages for landlords. The latter would be discounted mortgage rates for buy-to-let homes rated Band C or above (or which the landlord promises to retrofit to a Band C within a certain timeframe). The former might mean making retrofits tax-deductible (although this would largely benefit landlords in higher tax brackets).

At present, only the replacement of assets in the home are tax-deductible as an 'allowable expense' for maintenance and repairs; energy efficiency upgrades are not. **Tax incentives were the most frequently cited policy ask when landlords were asked how the Government could support energy efficiency improvements:**

"Any kind of discounts or tax breaks or financial incentives - being able to write things off against tax. Also, if you are required to spend £15,000 on your property, perhaps you do something gradually over time, so you've got limits? You know, £3000 over a number of years, and that is also tax free."

Statistical data supports the popularity of this idea. Where energy efficiency upgrades are needed, 54% of landlords would certainly and 38% would maybe be motivated by tax incentives or grants. Only 8% said they would not be motivated by this.[41] Tenants were also broadly supportive of this idea:

"I think that's brilliant. Because it's an incentive for them to do it. Because looking at my landlord now, as long as he's getting rent every month for this house, he doesn't care…I would [also] be more confident in approaching my landlord saying, 'Look, did you know that if you get this, if you get my house from a C to an A, you get this off of it?'. And they're less inclined to put my rent up."

However, there are limitations. These incentives would be less effective where landlords do not pay tax (e.g. charities) or where properties are owned outright without a mortgage. Several interviewees emphasized that such an incentive should be long-term rather than one-off, in order to encourage sustained investment in property improvements.

[40] UKRI: Business Connect (Accessed 30 March 2026), 'Let Zero'
[41] TDS Charitable Foundation (2025), Voice of the Landlord

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings presented in this report highlight the multiple challenges that tenants and landlords experience in accessing funding for energy efficiency improvements. Whilst the cost of measures is consistently cited as the biggest challenge, other barriers also require attention.

This chapter sets out several recommendations to help ensure energy efficiency funding is used effectively. The PRS is highly diverse; there are many different types of landlords and tenants with many different motivations and needs. Funding should reflect this.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Tenant protection from rent increases and eviction

- Ensuring tenants are aware of their rights to redress is crucial. Tenants should be educated on their existing right to challenge these kinds of unreasonable rent increases via the First-tier Tribunal.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Proactive enforcement

- Local authorities need to be appropriately resourced and trained to enforce new MEES rules. The PRS Ombudsman should have the power to intervene if necessary.

- The statutory duty for councils to enforce MEES could be strengthened, and revenues to fund enforcement activity ring-fenced.

- The monitoring and enforcement burden on local authorities could also be eased through improved use of data. This includes the new PRS database, building passports, and Unique Property Reference Numbers. The database must be easily accessible by local authorities. It should be linked to the MEES PRS exemption register.

- Additionally, stronger legal enforcement against 'scam' insulation traders or cases of installer fraud should be combined with a simplified redress and quality scheme. One that holds installers to clear standards. This allows landlords and tenants to feel confident that mis-sold or mis-installed products will be put right.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Continuing to prioritize the least efficient properties and most vulnerable tenants

- Most grant-based financial support should continue to prioritize tenants on lower incomes and/or (or those with vulnerabilities such as long-term health conditions), and the small number of landlords who are themselves on lower incomes. This support should also continue to focus on properties in the lower EPC bands (G - D).

- These grants should be substantial enough to outweigh the administrative 'hassle' (particularly for small-portfolio landlords), covering either full costs or requiring only minimal customer contribution. Schemes open to the PRS are more likely to be used if they offer limited numbers of applicants meaningful sums, rather than large numbers of applicants small sums.

- Where grants are partial, they must advertise in a crystal-clear and upfront fashion that a customer contribution is needed.

- These grants should be given in lieu of completely exempting landlords with low-rent/low-value properties from the new MEES standards, as that may leave vulnerable tenants in fuel poverty. Since not everyone who is fuel-poor chooses to claim or qualifies for means-tested benefits, additional ways of identifying and targeting fuel-poor tenants for these grants should be considered.[42]

- The exception to means-tested funding should be grants towards low-carbon heating (i.e. heat pumps, district heating system connections, biomass boilers). In the short-term, this should be available to homeowners of all tenures, without means-testing.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Raising awareness of and capacity for retrofits of traditional buildings

- Whilst 'low-hanging fruit' (i.e. straightforward detached or semi-detached postwar houses with cavity walls) in any tenure remains uninsulated, it should be a priority. However, tailored retrofit guidance should also be available and advertised for period properties. This includes existing advice sources (e.g. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings' helpline).

- Myth-busting campaigns could raise public awareness that landlords' retrofitting of these traditional properties is possible. Again, the timing of such campaigns would be important; launching this such that it overshadowed existing tenant awareness-raising around the Renters' Rights Act would be inadvisable

- Awareness of legitimate MEES exemptions should also be raised, so that landlords with particularly hard to treat traditional properties do not mistakenly worry that they need to finance and install inappropriate upgrades.

- More tradespeople should be supported to upskill in non-standard insulation techniques for these property types.

- Open-homes initiatives featuring retrofitted traditional properties (e.g. the Green Open Homes network) should be promoted and marketed to landlords and tenants.

- Planning permissions could also be reviewed – such as removing the blanket requirement for heat pumps to be situated to reduce visual impact, whilst retaining it specifically for conservation areas and listed buildings. This gives older yet non-listed, non-conservation-area properties greater abilities to install renewables.

[42] Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), 'On a low income, but not claiming means-tested benefits'

RECOMMENDATION 5

Lowering electricity prices to encourage heat pump uptake

- The long-term funding strategy, to ensure heat pump uptake, should not be based on subsidies for initial installation. Additionally, whilst the October 2026 VAT cut on electricity prices is a welcome move, this is only temporary. In the long run, permanently cost-competitive electricity rates should take over as a primary strategy here. [43]

- Whilst the current relative expense of electricity is less problematic for heat pumps paired with solar panels, many PRS properties are flats, or older buildings with unsuitable roofing. They cannot install solar. Therefore, the electricity-to-gas price ratio (EtGPR) needs to be reviewed.

- This price structure for electricity should also allow heat pumps to run cost-effectively in even poorly-insulated buildings.[44]

- This should be enacted without disadvantaging those on low incomes, likely by putting the additional levies onto gas prices instead whilst having a 'social tariff' in place.[45] If regional divergence in the number of heat pump installations is deemed acceptable, zonal pricing for electricity could be considered too.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Making loan-based funding widely available for landlords

- Zero-interest loan funding should be widely available for any landlords requiring support with upfront costs. Though uptake is likely to be modest (as landlords with savings often prefer to use these instead) this option should be available for those who do want to spread the cost.

- Loans should be from the Government, or else a public-private partnership with government-approved kitemark, as landlords often dislike using exclusively private finance for retrofits.

- If private funding is included, a potential funding pot should be made available from the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) for approved lenders to cover the price differential between market interest rates and the terms of the kitemarked loan.



[43] Harrington, N.. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (2025), Factors influencing Heat Pump Adoption in Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom: International Comparative Case Study
[44] Nesta (2025), Tax-free electricity: A proposal to remove most taxes on electricity to reduce bills and promote clean heating
[45] Leather, Z. and Marshall, J.. Resolution Foundation & European Climate Foundation (2025), Turning up the heat: Making the home heating transition work for low-income households

RECOMMENDATION 7

Free, impartial, expert energy advice and support with scheme applications

- The centralised advice service of the Warm Homes Agency should be fully integrated with funding schemes. It should be free, independent, and impartial. Its staff should be trained in relevant technical as well as administrative information.

- Additionally, there should be localized, area-based energy advice hubs or one-stop-shops (similar to Home Energy Scotland's network of regional hubs).

- It should be supported by a range of industry partners and able to advise users on finding qualified and Trustmark-certified installers.

- To effectively support renters experiencing the most severe fuel poverty, the service must be equipped—potentially through roles similar to EnergyCarer staff—to assist those with additional needs. This includes tenants with vulnerabilities, individuals who are digitally excluded, those requiring translation services, and people with disabilities, such as those who rely on electrical equipment for daily care.

- The service should have the capacity for household aftercare, such as teaching residents how to best use new technologies, or raise complaints.

- Letting agencies should also have appropriate training to help landlords through the retrofit process, and act on their behalf where appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Encouraging alternative financial incentives beyond grants and loans

- Emerging financial solutions and incentives, as proposed by the National Retrofit Hub, should be promoted to landlords.

- These could include heat-as-a-service models or pay-what-you-can approaches (as trialled by Leeds City Council), as well as phased finance concepts. Specialized green mortgage products (e.g. Barclay's, the Ecology Building Society) should remain available in buy-to-let forms. Local authority 'Empty Homes Funds', where a council pays for retrofit of a property in return for leasing it for five years as a council home, should be promoted and widely advertised. Equity release schemes to fund retrofit should also be encouraged (similar to Scotland's HEEPS Equity Loan).

- Tax relief on rental properties achieving EPC band A, B, or C could also be explored as an option.

- Awareness of the wider benefits of retrofit needs to be improved. This includes how a high MEES rating demonstrably increases the saleability of a home, lowers ongoing maintenance hassles, improves tenant health (and thus reduces the risk of rental arrears through tenants falling ill), increases tenant satisfaction and positive landlord-tenant relationships, and encourages tenants to stay longer-term (reducing void periods and avoiding letting agent re-listing fees). Retrofit information from the Warm Homes Agency should draw on existing evidence that installing renewables does not lower the value of a property.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Revised Energy Performance Certificates, with improved accuracy and readability

- The future new-look Energy Performance Certificates must provide an accurate picture of a rental property's performance, whilst ensuring consistency across jurisdictions. They should prioritize user-friendliness and be easy for tenants to read.
- They should indicate appropriately to readers how many points each isolated measure would add to the SAP score and give clear indication of how to reach each band. They should be usable even where a reader is not willing/able to deduce the SAP score via simple arithmetic or to install measures in the ideal sequence.

APPENDIX

Socio-demographic characteristics of tenant and landlord interview participants

Some demographic characteristics of the landlord and tenant interview sample are summarised below.

REGION OF ENGLAND WHERE PROPERTY/ PROPERTIES MAINLY LOCATED	COUNT	%	WORK STATUS	COUNT	%
Midlands	9	29%	Working full time	13	42%
North West	2	6%	Working part time	5	16%
Greater London	2	6%	Retired	1	3%
South East	6	19%	Self-employed	1	3%
South West	2	6%	Not working due to long-term sickness/disability	3	10%
Yorkshire and Humberside	3	10%	Student	2	6%
Prefer not to say	7	23%	Prefer not to say	6	19%
		(note these may not round to 100)		(note these may not round to 100)	
GENDER	**COUNT**	**%**	**PARTICIPANT HAD MEASURES INSTALLED VIA A SCHEME**	**COUNT**	**%**
Female	16	52	Yes	18	58
Male	13	42	No	13	42
Prefer not to say	2	6			

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