

# **Enhanced Heating Regimes Consultation**

## Householder focus groups

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## 1 Introduction

Scottish Government are currently consulting on the Enhanced Heating Regimes as part of the Fuel Poverty Bill. The Fuel Poverty Bill sets out the various factors that are considered in the definition of both fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty, including the requisite temperature and time the home should be heated to (the 'heating regime'). The type of heating regime used dictates the estimated costs that would be needed to provide the household with a sufficiently warm home. It is recognised that some people are more vulnerable to the effects of a cold home and require an enhanced heating regime with either higher temperatures, longer hours or both. The Enhanced Heating Regimes are a set of assumptions, laid out in the Bill and used in the calculation of fuel poverty rates, about the room temperatures and hours of heating which are appropriate for vulnerable households. The consultation is being undertaken to inform the secondary legislation which will specify the types of household to which the Enhanced Heating Regimes will apply.

As part of the consultation, Scottish Government have asked Energy Saving Trust (EST) to conduct three focus groups with households to understand how the views of those with lived experience of fuel poverty might match the different enhanced heating regimes.

## 2 Aims

The aim of this research was to understand how people with lived experience of fuel poverty used their heating and the extent to which they were able to keep their homes to a comfortable temperature. The groups looked specifically at:

1. How household members heat their home during the winter,
2. The different perceptions of comfort levels of household members and the impact this has on how they heat their home in the winter,
3. Any limitations or impacts of heating their home in the winter on the health and welfare of the household members.

## 3 Methodology

EST were asked to facilitate three focus groups to capture feedback from those unlikely to have completed the Enhanced Heating Regime online consultation.

The focus groups were targeted at the fuel poor, specifically those with 'lived experience' and from the various categories listed in the Bill for the Environmental Health Regulations including:

- low income families (particularly those with young children)
- single parents
- elderly (particularly over 75s)
- younger people
- unemployed
- people with chronic health conditions.

The focus groups were held in Kirkconnel, Kirkcaldy and Dundee, on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2019.

Attendees were recruited using EST's connections through partner organisations:

- Kirkconnel - The Hub in Dumfries used their regional contacts to help recruit a group in Kirkconnel. The Hub is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation that develops and delivers a range of social inclusion projects that build resilient and sustainable communities using a community asset-based approach.
- Dundee - Faith in the Community Dundee, part of Faith in Community Scotland, work with faith communities, mainly in the poorest communities of Dundee, to tackle poverty and exclusion. They recruited participants to attend the group directly.
- Kirkcaldy - Greener Kirkcaldy, a community-led charity and development trust working on a local scale to benefit people and our environment worked in conjunction with EST to recruit participants.

The aim was to recruit between six and 10 participants to each group. In the end, Kirkconnel and Kirkcaldy had nine participants and Dundee has fourteen participants.

Each focus group was facilitated by a member of Energy Saving Trust's evaluation team. The facilitator used a pre-determined topic guide (See Appendix A) to direct the discussion. This report presents the results of the discussions and dialogs captured from the focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to draw out the key themes of the discussion. Where quotes have been used, each participant have been given a code; the participant information (i.e. their characteristics) is included in the appendices for reference.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Participant information

In total, 32 people participated in the focus groups. Table 4-1 shows the split of focus group participants:

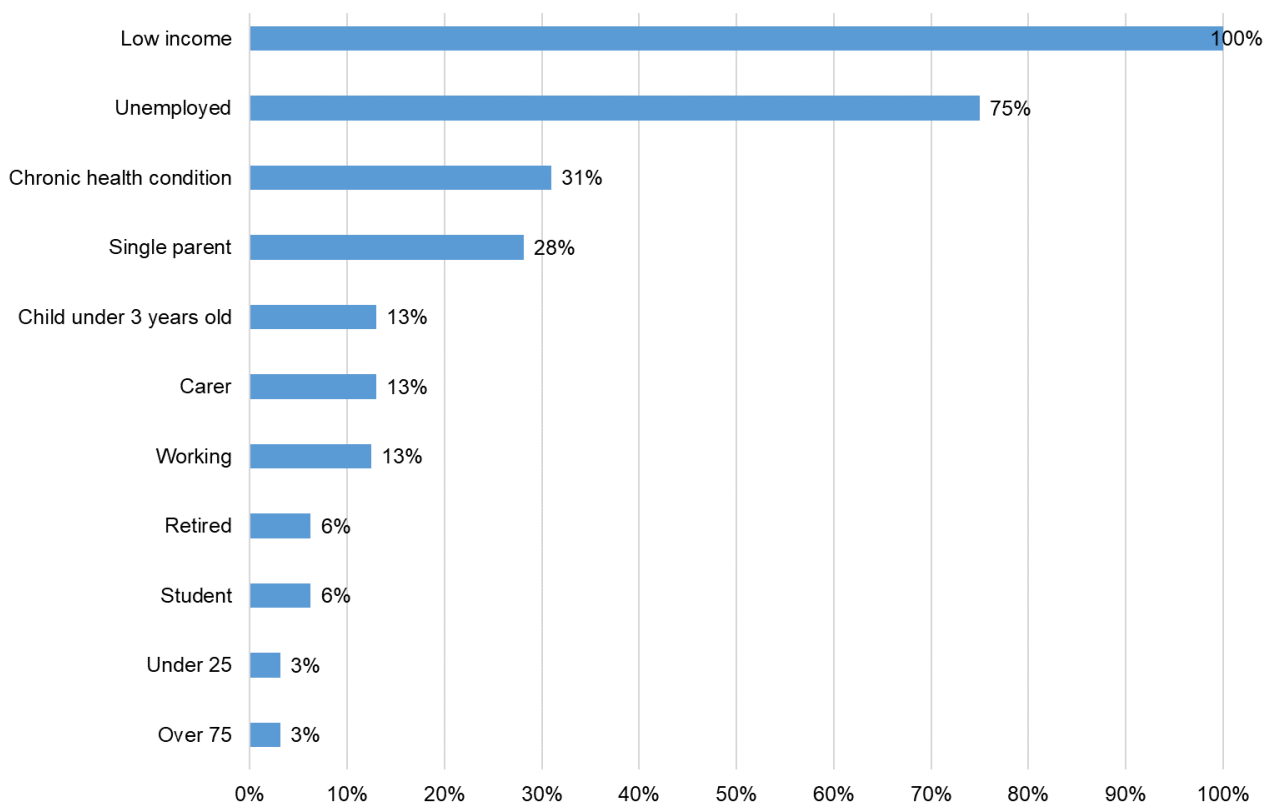
**Table 4-1: Participant breakdown**

Focus Group	Participants
Kirkconnel	9
Kirkcaldy	9
Dundee	14

Across the three groups there were 20 females and 12 males whose ages ranged from 23 to over 75 (most participants were aged between 35 and 54 years old (66%)).

Participants covered all the different characteristics mentioned in the Bill. Due to the short timescales for recruitment and the vast number of characteristic types it was not possible to get an even number of people from each grouping. Figure 4-1 shows the breakdown of participants; 24 were unemployed, four worked, two were retired and two were students. 10 had a long-term health condition and nine were single parents. All participants were on a low income.

**Figure 4-1: Household type of participants**



Half of the participants were in council housing and around a third were with a registered social landlord; four rented from a private landlord whilst two participants owned their property. 17 lived in a flat, 14 lived in a house and one lived in a bedsit.

All but three participants were claiming some form of benefit whilst one participant lived off zero income (this participant had chosen to not claim any benefits except their housing is paid by housing benefit. This individual also volunteers for a charity – which helps by giving them care packages or food and clothes, they also got occasional financial help from family members).

15 participants had one or more children; four had at least one child under three years old. Nine of those that had children were single parents.

The majority of participants used gas to heat their home (28); one participant had district heating. 19 were on a prepayment meter whilst the remainder paid their fuel bills via direct debit.

## **4.2 Use of their heating during the winter**

Participants were asked to explain how they heated their home during the winter. For example, was their heating on all day or on a timer; how long was the heating on for and what temperature did they have the heating at.

### **4.2.1 Timing of heating**

Most (25 participants) said that they were indoors most of the time. This was mainly due to not working (due to being unemployed, retired or having a long-term health condition) or because they were a full-time carer for a household member.

Half of participants reported that they had their heating on a timer. Most of these put their timer on between 06:00 and 06:30 until around 08:00/08:30; having it come on again between 16:00 and 17:00 until 21:00/22:00. One person put their timer on at 05:00 as that was when they went to work. One person had not put their heating on for five years because they were in debt with the government for claiming benefits when they should not have been:

*“I’ve not had my heating on for 5 years. My block is aligned. So, everyone else uses their heat and it comes through my walls. It’s a case of using the duvet if I am cold.” DD3.1*

One person reported that they only used the timer for very short periods:

*“We used to set it for 15 minutes before we got up and then 15 minutes before he [her child] left, so it was on for like half an hour in the morning and then it would come on for half an hour during the day, just because it would be cold for me. Then we would have it on again for another two hours in the evening because that’s all we could afford. If I could, I would definitely have it on a lot more.”*

Those that didn't have a timer mainly just turned the heating on and off as required and as much as they felt they could afford to do. When asked what time the heating went on, some participants commented that it depended whether it was a weekday or the weekend.

*"Depends - if it's a school day I put it on before the kids get up to warm them up." KL1.5*

Some respondents mentioned that they try to keep the heating on as much as possible during the day (although this can be dependent on the extent to which they feel they can afford to do so). Reasons for keeping the heating on all the time included not liking being cold, keeping it on for themselves if they had a long term health condition (or for those they cared for with a long term health condition), if they had children under 3 years old, and the weather (e.g. if the temperature outside drops or if it rains):

*"I leave the heating on all the time. Even when out as [I] like to come back to a warm home. I don't like being cold." P 1.5*

*"She [daughter] feels cold during the day and she gets a lot of aches and pains, so we have to have the heating on all the time." KY2.7*

*"If I didn't have him [15-month-old baby] then I probably wouldn't have the heating on" DD3.14*

*"The temperature drops when it rains, and I feel the cold then" KY2.6*

Many participants commented that they would only heat downstairs during the day and might put the heating on for a short while upstairs before bedtime. Another participant said that they only heated the living room in the winter; this participant lived alone and worked. Whilst another commented that their kitchen had no heating as it was broken and so they did not use it any more other than when they needed to cook.

#### **4.2.2 Comfortable levels of heating**

Participants were asked what a comfortable level heat for them was. All participants gave responses around how warm they felt, none mentioned any other indicators of comfort such as the air being fresh. Not many participants had a room thermostat and therefore were unsure as to the exact temperature their home was. The majority of those who had a thermostat (seven respondents) and therefore knew what the temperature was in their home, stated that they would ideally have the temperature of their home at 23 degrees Celsius or higher:

*"Ideally for me it would be 23/24. The highest I would click it is 24, but that's only when I'm really cold." KY2.1*

Others knew that they heated the house to a low temperature but that it was all they could afford:

*"I can't afford to heat it more than 18 degrees. And 18 degrees is cold"*

The remaining participant had their room temperature at 21 degrees Celsius.

Reasons for having their home at 23 degrees or higher included:

*"We do like our comfort; we do like to have the heating up." KY2.4*

*“Because I’m a carer, the heat needs to be right and comfy” DD3.1*

*“For the kids really” KY2.4*

One person who did not have a thermostat said being comfortable and warm meant not having to put an extra duvet on at night, or extra jumpers:

*“You just don’t want to wake up and be freezing” KY2.3*

Another person said: *“I go on how I feel as to how hot I have the house.” 3.14*

One participant lived in a new build council house that had two heating systems; one upstairs and one downstairs. This enabled the participant to heat upstairs and downstairs at different temperatures:

*“The two systems (separate heating systems for upstairs and downstairs) are a really good idea. We can make upstairs cosy before we go to bed.” KY2.5*

Some participants, regardless of whether they had a room thermostat or not, indicated that they had no choice but to put an extra jumper on, or use more duvets, or even an electric heater on enough just to warm the room, as they could not afford to heat their home to a comfortable level all the time through the winter:

*“I think it’s what you can afford. We’ve been given these little portable heaters by the council which are okay, but you can’t heat up the whole house and you can’t leave them on all the time.” KY2.1*

*“I just have a blanket addiction now because we can’t afford the heating. If I could I would definitely have it on a lot more.” KY2.3*

*“The home doesn’t get that hot, so I have to wear lots of blankets.” KY2.7*

*“In the wintertime, if my meter is running low, I just get a little electric heater and put it on for 10 minutes to heat the room up.” DD3.7*

*“I encourage everyone to use a blanket rather than turn the heating up if it gets too cold.”*

*“We’ve got these thermal socks, so I put them on and then I put slippers on.”*

### **4.3 Difficulties heating home**

All participants stated that cost was the main difficulty when it came to heating their home and dictated the extent to which they could heat their home to a comfortable level, for example:

*“My bill is £84 a month and it’s only really downstairs that we’re heating. You’ve got to have money for your shopping at the end of the day.” KY2.5*

*“Because I’m on benefits and my health... and because my business is just starting again I don’t have any income coming in” KY2.7*

*“I worry about paying bills and try to not use the heating as much.” KY2.9*

*“I’ve had troubles with suppliers and getting into debt. This has “put the fear of God in me about putting my heating on” KY2.6*

*“I get paid tomorrow and it’ll be gone by the next day.” KL1.2*



Another difficulty heating their homes was the energy efficiency of the property they lived in.

*"I think sometimes as well as cost it's the state of insulation as well".*

Most participants (60%) said that they felt their homes were energy inefficient, that the heat just disappears, and their home is always cold:

*"As soon as I turn it [the heating] off its freezing." KL1.1*

*"Back door is in the living room – the minute I open the door the heat goes. So, you're back to square one, you start again." KL1.3*

*"Place is a torture to heat" KL1.4*

*"I do find the heating works really well when it's on, but as soon as it turns off it just disappears."*

*"You turn the heating on and it's going literally out my window. There is also a gap so big in my front door that you can see light coming through it at the bottom and when it's windy you can hear it whistling." KY2.3*

Although 60% claimed their homes were energy inefficient, not many participants had done much to their homes to make them more energy efficient. The main reason for this was because all but two participants did not own their property and therefore had to rely on the council or landlord to make improvements to the property. It was also quite clear that some did not know what level of insulation or draughtproofing they had. Only one participant mentioned they had cavity wall insulation, two had cladding, eight knew what type of windows they had (three single glazed, four double glazed and one triple glazed). Nobody mentioned loft insulation – however over half lived in a flat (53%).

There was also a fear from one participant about making energy efficient improvements to their home:

*"I'm not having my windows replaced because I've heard a lot of nightmare stories" KL1.3*

One participant that owned their home said that they try to do something every year to improve their home:

*"Each year I try and do something new on the house, so I've done the windows, the doors, the patio." KY2.8*

Another participant, who was in a new build council house, had what was meant to be an energy efficient property but they felt the ventilation system caused the house to cool down too much:

*"The house itself is all-singing all-dancing, insulation, triple glazed, you name it this house has got it so it should be like a little furnace – unfortunately, it has a ventilation system in it because it is a sealed unit." KY2.5*

When other participants were asked about how they ventilated their home. Some said they just open the windows. Two participants had a built-in ventilation system, but felt it made their homes colder. One of these participants had a ventilation system that sucked air in from outside, warmed it, and sent it round the house – however, the system cooled the air down too much. The other participant reported they had a hole in the wall that let a lot of heat out.

Despite the lack of insulation/ draughtproofing, some participants had taken simple measures to keep the heat in their homes. This included putting up thermal curtains and closing doors to keep in the heat:

*“So, we’re just trying to get through, just put thermal curtains up and hope for the best really.”*  
KY2.3

*“We’re doing loads of things to try and make the house warmer, like keep the doors closed.”*  
KY2.5

*“Closing doors helps me, I close the door to keep the heat in.”* KY2.1

#### **4.4 Impacts of not being able to heat home sufficiently**

Participants were asked about the impacts of not being able to heat their homes properly. The main comments were around condensation/ damp (28%); mould (16%); exacerbating health conditions (13%) and anxiety and stress (19%).

*“When I have a flare up, I can’t seem to heat myself and then it’s a vicious circle”* KY2.3

*“I have health conditions which are made worse by the cold.”* KY2.6

*“If you can’t afford to have hot water to go for an interview – that’s going to affect your mental state going into that interview and you may not do as well as you wanted to do and not get the job”* DD3.1

*“Smart meters stress me out watching the dial go red”* DD3.13

*“How long can I have this [the heating] on for before it costs too much and causes me stress?”*  
KY2.3

*“Most of the time I’m keeping a blanket over me so that I can keep my muscles warm as well. That is to try and stop the spasms rather than just keeping warm.”*

*“I find I sleep with my normal duvet and with one of those heavy duvets as well. When my skin is exposed it just can’t deal with the cold. I have Raynaud’s so my skin is sensitive to temperature so I find we have the heating on for longer if we can afford it.”*

Some participants said that, as a result of not being able to heat their home sufficiently, they chose to sit upstairs as ‘heat rises’ or just heat one room and stay in that room:

*“I sit upstairs because its warmer and heat rises”* KL1.1

*“We can make upstairs cosy before we go to bed”* KY2.5

#### **4.5 Other types of householders that would find it hard to heat their homes in the winter**

Participants were asked if they could think of any other householder types, apart from those in attendance at the focus groups, that would find it hard to heat their homes in the winter.

The only other householders mentioned were pregnant ladies and those on shift work (who would be heating their homes at peak times if they worked nights).

*“If you can’t heat your house when you’re pregnant – how’s that going to make you feel about bringing a baby in to the world?”* DD3.14

#### 4.6 Other comments relating to the use of heating in their homes

Finally, participants were asked if they had any other comments to add. The following comments were of interest:

Regarding switching from a pre-payment meter to direct debit. *“I would be scared to go for a direct debit, because if I did that, I don’t know how I would pay for that and I wouldn’t be able to balance my life”* 2.7

There was a feeling that energy companies didn’t treat consumers fairly, due to the high standing charge even if they didn’t use their heating they would still incur a cost and potentially end up in debt: *“They need to get rid of this 30, 40 pence daily charge [on pre-payment meters]”* DD3.14

There was a consensus that councils/government should do more to support people on low incomes as heating is a basic human need:

*“I think energy should be given out as part of a citizens basic income. Everybody should be warm and have enough to eat.”* 3.1

*“Universal credit isn’t working.”* DD3.9

## 5 Enhanced Heating Regimes Summary

Section 4 described the main findings from the focus groups and how householders feel about heating their home in the winter. This section summarises these views and opinions and links them with the different enhanced heating regimes.

### 5.1 Enhanced Heating Regime 1 – higher temperature for longer hours

- 23 degrees Celsius for the living room and 20 degrees Celsius for any other room
- 16 hours a day
- Applied where:
  - a household member has a long-term mental or physical illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more AND they regularly spend more time in the home during winter
  - a member is in receipt of benefits received for a care need or disability AND they regularly spend more time in the home during winter
  - a member of the household is age 75 and over AND they regularly spend more of their time in the home during winter

Many of the participants in the focus groups had a long-term mental or physical illness, or were a carer, or over 75. The majority of these people were in their homes for long periods of time as it was difficult for them to get out of the house, this was especially the case in winter when weather conditions can make it even more difficult to leave their home. When discussing when they ideally needed the heating on many mentioned having it come on at 6.00am/6.30am and then turning it off at 9.00pm/9.30pm – a total of 15/16 hours a day. Few were able to heat their homes for this long though due to the cost.

Many participants mentioned that the cold made their condition worse and therefore needed to have their home kept as warm as possible. *“The cold affects my disability – the heating helps my aches and pains and so I ideally need it on as much as possible.”*

## 5.2 Enhanced Heating Regime 2 – higher temperature with standard hours

- 23 degrees Celsius for the living room and 20 degrees Celsius for any other room
- 9 hours a day on a weekday and 16 hours a day during the weekend.
- Applied where:
  - a member has a long-term mental or physical illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, but they DO NOT regularly spend more time in the home, on weekdays, during the winter
  - a member is in receipt of benefits received for a care need or disability, but they DO NOT regularly spend more time in the home, on weekdays, during the winter
  - a member of the household is age 75 and over but they do not regularly spend more time in the home, on weekdays, during the winter
    - This Enhanced Heating Regime recognises that not all long term mental or physical illnesses impact on people's day to day lives and activities.
    - Many people with long term conditions are in full time employment or spend time outside the home for other reasons, but this regime recognises that these individuals may be more vulnerable and therefore should have a higher temperature in their home.

Some of the participants in the focus groups had a long-term mental or physical illness but did not spend more time than average in the home during the week since they were employed, or they were studying at college.

Despite their ability to work or study, the cold can cause problems to their health conditions and so when they are at home it is of benefit to them to heat their home to an appropriate temperature. One of these participants mentioned that they were unable to afford to heat to the temperature they needed so they would use an electric heater to give a quick burst of heat. A couple mentioned having to use additional blankets and jumpers as well as thermal socks to be able to keep themselves sufficiently warm.

### 5.3 Enhanced Heating Regime 3 – standard temperature for longer hours

- 21 degrees Celsius for the living room and 18 degrees Celsius for any other room
- 16 hours a day
- Enhanced Heating Regime 3 applies the standard temperature but for longer hours.
- Recognise that some households with young children may spend more time in the home and are therefore more likely to require longer heating hours.
- The amount of time spent in the home may reduce from birth onwards as children become eligible for funded early learning and childcare. *In Scotland all 3 and 4 year olds (and around a quarter of 2 year olds) are eligible for funded early learning and childcare of around 600 hours a year and from August 2020 this will increase to 1140 hours a year (the equivalent of 30 hours a week if taken term time).*
- In light of this and the levels of uptake it is proposed that only households with children under the age of 3 who spend more time in the home would have the enhanced heating regime with longer hours applied.
- Applied where:
  - Households have children under the age of 3 AND who regularly spend more time at home during the winter

Four participants had children under the age of 3 living with them. All mentioned that one of the main reasons to have the heating on was to ensure that their children were warm rather than themselves. All these participants said that they (and their children) were in their homes most of the time, especially so in winter.

Whilst participants stated that they wanted to make sure that their children were warm enough, with many encouraging the use of jumpers and blankets before putting the heating on, there was no evidence that they needed the heating to be on at a higher temperature than average.

In addition, there were a number of low income, unemployed participants who were at home for longer hours than those who are out working. There was a concern that due to their low income they were unable to heat their homes to a comfortable level and had concerns about their ability to pay their heating bills. It was mentioned that living in these conditions can lead to anxiety and stress, and so whilst they may not already be suffering from a long-term physical or mental illness it may lead to a vicious circle where anxiety and stress can lead them to be less likely to get a job which can lead to more stress and anxiety due to their inability to heat their homes and pay bills.