



**Working with customers to
make net zero carbon a reality**



building
communities



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

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FOREWORD

Paul Richards,
Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit



The UK Government will be leading attempts at the COP26 Climate Change Conference this Autumn to make global progress on the action and delivery plans needed to reach net zero carbon greenhouse gas emissions targets. Recent reports demonstrate without any doubt the need to take urgent action and as a result the UK is set to undergo wholesale changes to the way we build and heat our homes.

Many of the changes necessary will involve substantial costs, with home buyers, owners, landlords and the Government facing the cost of higher new home standards and of retrofitting, whilst customers face the potential for increased costs to heat their homes. There is a real challenge ahead to meet these competing demands.

As one of the UK's foremost housing groups, Orbit is committed to creating thriving communities and putting customers at the centre of everything we do. In May this year, we gathered the views of 900 customers to help us understand our social rented households' priorities around the net zero carbon agenda, as well as to examine what matters to them in relation to their environment.

This study, which is jointly produced with the Chartered Institute of Housing, is one of the first in-depth pieces of work of its kind. The insight gathered from our customers gives us an immense amount of food for thought and underlines that working collaboratively and engaging our customers throughout the course of this process is fundamental to the net zero carbon transformation.

Our research shows that customers are already struggling with their heating and energy bills and that any plan to retrofit properties should and must reflect their daily financial struggles. It is essential to undertake further work to understand the short and long-term costs to customers of moving to net zero carbon. Low-income and vulnerable households will undoubtedly require support to cope with any energy price rises and the long-term cost of adaptations. The future policies for energy pricing must be considered given this wider context.

The research also shows there is a great opportunity to increase public awareness of the behaviours and choices that could be made that will benefit both our environment and our resident's well-being. We must work with customers to understand our role in supporting this. The UK's housing association sector is in a unique position and needs to think carefully and clearly about the role it can and should play. Collaborating with each other and with customers across the sector will be essential as we progress to net zero carbon and support wider environmental change.

We know we don't have all the answers and there is still much to learn, but I hope this report starts a conversation about the difficult and complex environmental challenges that face us all in accelerating the decarbonisation of UK homes. With support we can improve the energy efficiency of the UK's social housing stock, reduce carbon emissions and improve the quality of life. But to achieve this, we must work hand-in-hand with the Government, the sector and our supply partners, but most importantly we must listen to and work with our customers.

INTRODUCTION

Gavin Smart,
Chief Executive at the Chartered Institute of Housing



Here at CIH, our role as the professional body is to support housing professionals to create a future in which everyone has a place to call home, and equip them to deliver the best possible services to tenants. As reaching the net zero carbon target takes centre stage, we want to provide everybody working in housing with the skills and knowledge needed to deliver the emerging decarbonisation agenda.

The housing sector should now be accelerating its business plans and taking the steps necessary to achieve net zero carbon targets. As we plan and begin delivering retrofit work, we must make sure that one crucial stakeholder has significant influence in this journey from start to finish: our customers, the tenants that we work with and for. Although we can work hard to provide our customers with energy-efficient, low carbon homes, it's how these homes are operated that will make or break their true environmental performance. As such, we must learn and work together to truly make the most of the huge task we need to undertake.

The findings and recommendations in this research offer invaluable insight into how social landlords can effectively work towards decarbonisation action plans while ensuring that tenants are at the forefront of the decision-making process. The social housing sector faces a significant challenge here, but it is one that I know our profession is ready and willing to meet.



METHODOLOGY



Telephone interviews were conducted by Marketing Means, an independent research company commissioned by Orbit's in-house Research and Insights team. Marketing Means is based in Devon and is a company partner of the Market Research Society.

The surveys were conducted with a representative sample of around 900 customers during May 2021. The purpose of the climate change research study was as follows:

1. To gain insight of customers' awareness and interest in environmental matters and the climate emergency.

2. To understand what environmental behaviours customers are already engaged in (recycling, energy efficiency, green purchases).

3. To understand customer priorities around the net zero carbon emissions agenda.

The sample was stratified to ensure that it was representative of Orbit's customer base in terms of:

- Tenure – rented and owners
 - Age of customer
 - Location (region)
 - Ethnicity
 - Property size
- Approximately 80% of Orbit's current portfolio of 45,000 homes comprise homes for rent, whilst 20% of its portfolio are homes that have been purchased through shared homeownership. They are located across 95 local authority areas in the Midlands, East Anglia and in the South-East of England.
- Orbit supports a diverse group of around 93,000 customers.
- 30% of households contain at least 1 child under 18 years of age
 - 41% are single person households
 - 12% of our customer base identify as BAME
 - The survey results have a 95% confidence level and a 3.22% margin of error.
- Working with customers to make net zero carbon a reality 7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, *Working with customers to make net zero carbon a reality*, looks at customers' feelings towards climate change and the understanding of the journey to net zero carbon. The research has been conducted with Orbit customers but provides useful insight into customer views that will help the sector consider how to shape decarbonisation plans and engage in a meaningful way, addressing issues that are most important to them.

Customer awareness and attitudes towards greening their homes are very mixed. The research findings make the case for a rethink of customer engagement and communication strategies so that landlords are working together and learning with tenants at each stage of decarbonisation work; from retrofit planning, to work on site and beyond.

England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland have their own specific targets for raising energy efficiency standards of their stock. However, all nations can use the research findings and recommendations within this report to better understand what role social landlords can play in building customer knowledge and tackling behavioural barriers to change.

The issue of energy costs is critical

Energy affordability is a critical issue, with 98% of customers citing utility bills as a primary concern.

97% are worried about having a comfortable temperature in the home and having heating that is easy to use.

Affordability is a key concern.

- 1 in 4 customers have gone without heating in the past 12 months to save money.
- 1 in 2 customers say they are spending more than 10% of take-home pay on energy costs.

These customers are:

- More likely to be renting (89%)
- Comprise a household with children
- Be unemployed or in part time work
- Living in the Eastern or London region
- Have electricity as their main heating source

Younger customers generally appear to be struggling more financially during the pandemic.

Customers are not switching energy providers very frequently and are therefore much more likely to be paying above-average energy tariffs. Only 22% have switched energy suppliers in the past 12 months, well below the national average.

50% of customers want access to electric charging stations for vehicles, reflecting the significant growth of electric vehicles in new car registrations.

Customer appreciation of the term net zero carbon is mixed

Although most customers had heard of the concept of net zero carbon, understanding is lower. 40% of customers who were aware of net zero carbon were not clear about what it means. Yet, customers are actively engaging in positive environmental habits.

Almost 4 in 5 customers (79%) are concerned about climate change as an issue and 73% of customers believe climate change is already impacting them.

The three most common customer habits identified are:

- Reducing and recycling waste
- Saving water around the house and garden
- Thinking about the wider impact of products

Customers also want to shop local and ensure they have access to enjoying green spaces and nature, though this behaviour is driven by non-environmental concerns.

Different priorities for different age groups are emerging. Whilst affordability and comfort are key for all groups, younger customers and families prioritise access to green space in contrast to the over 65's who place greater emphasis on the ease of use of heating technologies.

Providing customers with insight and information

Customers have expressed high levels of interest in receiving more information and contributing to future discussions about the environment.

- 77% want to hear about environmental, financial and comfort benefits
- 58% of customers are keen to be told about opportunities for how they can save money on their utility bills
- 93% of customers believe that Orbit has a responsibility to make decisions that deliver a positive impact and protect the environment, and this is something that is encouraged to be explored with tenants across the wider sector

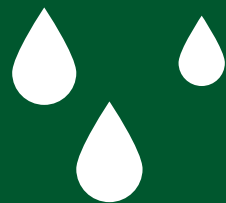
Preferred channels for communication and information include:

- 47% of customers would look on Orbit's website
- 27% would call the Call Centre for more information about the environment

32% of customers wanted to be invited to volunteering events focused on improving the environment.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

THE ISSUE OF ENERGY COSTS IS CRITICAL



What's important to customers?



98% say utility bills being affordable
(85% very)



97% say home being a comfortable temperature
(81% very)



97% say having heating that is easy to use
(79% very)



92% say having access to green space nearby - within a 10-minute walk
(73% very)



90% say having the ability to understand how much energy you are using
(59% very)



87% say having access to safe walking and cycling routes
(67% very)



84% say living in a home that has a low or no negative impact on the environment
(46% very)



73% say having access to public transport
(50% very)



50% say having the ability to charge an electric vehicle
(34% very)

Energy affordability is a critical issue, with 98% citing utility bills as a primary concern. Their concerns also centre around practical considerations about their home environment, with 97% of customers worried about having a comfortable temperature and having heating that is easy to use.

This trend is replicated across all age groups with younger customers, families with younger children and those aged over 65, all of whom cited utility bills and a comfortable temperature amongst their top three priorities.

The direct home and immediate environment are far more important to customer* than access to infrastructure such as public transport (73%) or cycle routes (87%); the importance of the environment is to their at-home experience rather than ethical considerations such as living in a low emission home (84%).

50% of customers want access to electric charging stations for vehicles, reflecting the significant growth of electric vehicles in new car registrations (which reached 8.5% of new car registrations in 2020).

* 18-34-year-olds

Spend on energy

54% of customers are spending more than 10% of their take-home income on energy bills. This is more than double the UK spend (3.9%) according to Ofgem.

% of household take-home pay spent on energy bills	Percentage
Do not know	24%
Less than 10%	22%
10% to 20%	24%
21% to 30%	13%
31% to 40%	8%
41% to 50%	6%
Over 50%	2%

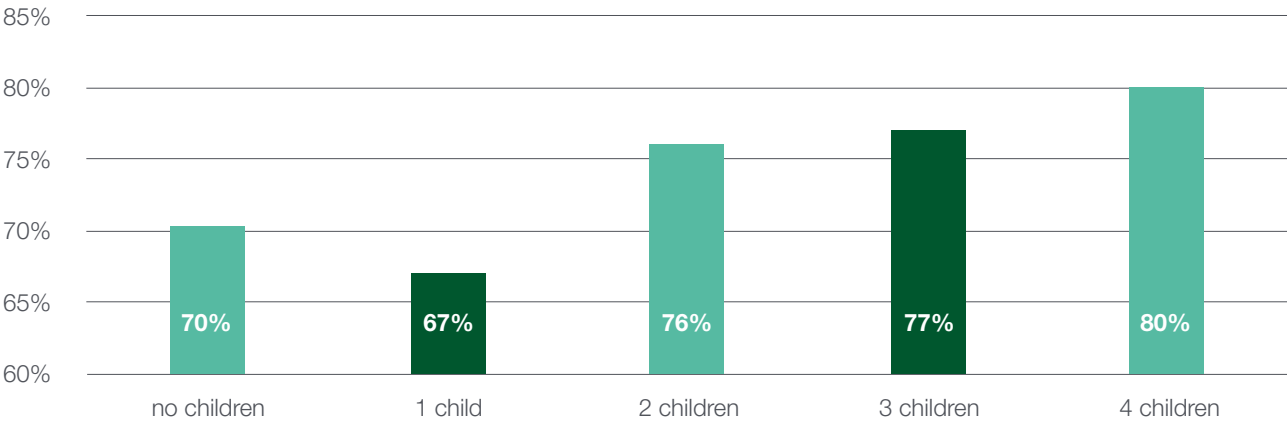
1/3 of owners paying more than 10%, compared to 2/3 of renters

EPC

Rating B – 51% of customers spending over 10%

Rating D – 70% of customers spending over 10%

Percentage spending over 10% on energy bills



58% of households with children spend over 10% vs 51% of households without children

This focus on energy affordability is particularly pressing for customers; more than 54% of residents spend 10% or more of their take-home pay on utility bills – twice the national average.

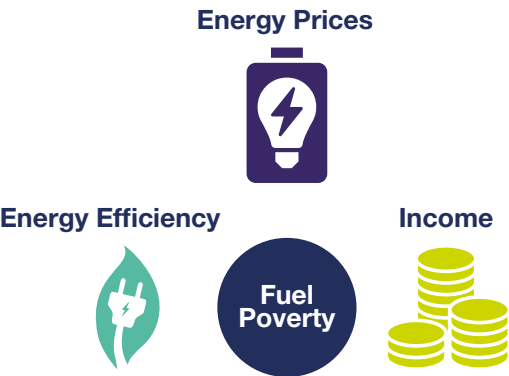
The situation is particularly acute for larger families, with over 80% of those with four or more children spending over 10% of take-home pay on bills; for

families with two or three children the figure is 76% /77% respectively.

Despite this challenging situation, energy efficiency makes a difference; while 70% of occupiers in homes with an EPC band D rating spend 10% or more of take-home pay, this figure falls to 51% in homes with a B rating.

“There is a tension between the rhetoric of net zero carbon and the reality of fuel poverty. It’s vital to appreciate that customers are already struggling financially and spending a disproportionate amount of their income on energy. As part of how we tackle the net zero carbon challenge, it is essential that we understand the struggles that are being faced on a daily basis.” – Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit

Fuel Poverty



Who are these customers ?

- More likely to be renting a home (89% renter vs 11% owner)
- Comprise a household containing children (41%)
- Be out of work / looking for work / in part-time work
- Occupying a home within a lower EPC band
- Living in a home in the Eastern or London region
- Main heating source is electric

25% of customers have gone without heating in the past 12 months to save money

60% say they are paying more than 10% of take home pay on energy costs

These cost burdens directly impact how customers use energy; a quarter of all those surveyed said that they had gone without heating to save money. Those most affected are renters (89%) and those looking for work or working part time; many are in lower EPC bands and rely on electricity for heating.

Despite the impact of energy costs on overall household income, customers are switching energy providers less than the national average*. 22% have switched in the past year, and 57% over the past three years. The overwhelming reason the general public look to switch suppliers is to move to a cheaper energy tariff.

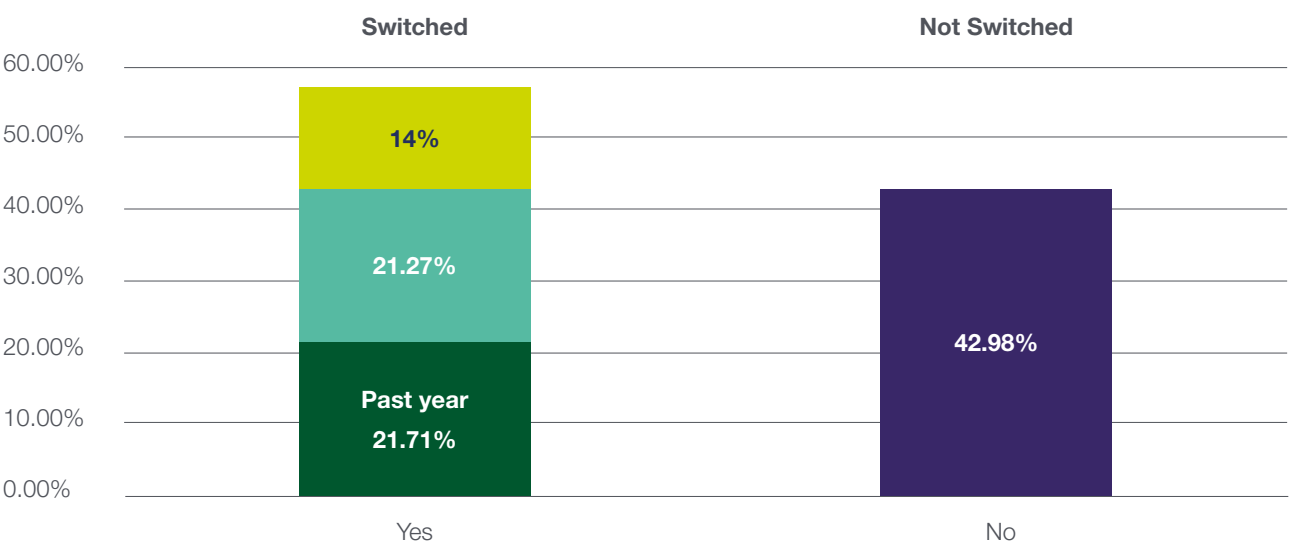
This is an important opportunity for Orbit to increase the promotion of its ‘Switch and Save’ initiative. It encourages customers to swap to green energy tariffs and includes a rebate on bills.

“Despite the impact of higher energy costs, customers are not switching energy providers as regularly as they might. There is more we need to do to highlight the cost-saving and environmental benefits of our Switch and Save offer to customers.” – Charley Gibbons, Director of Customer Experience at Orbit

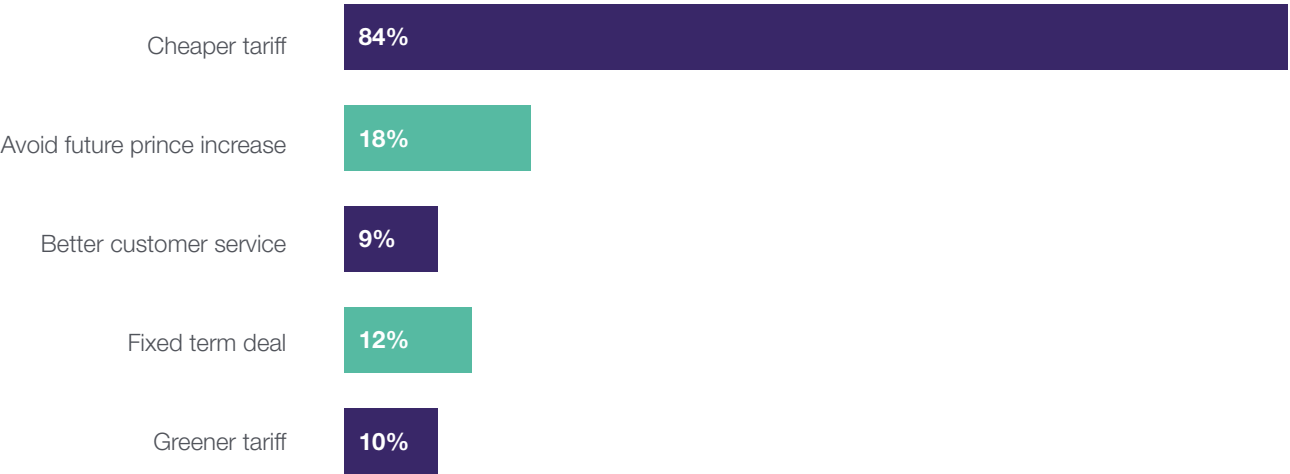
* By comparison, 20% of customers in the UK switched electricity provider and 18% switched gas provider in 2020. Source: Ofgem

Switching energy providers

57% of Orbit customers have swapped energy provider to save money in recent years
Ofgem's Consumer Survey 2019 reported 33% of UK households switched in 2019. From our research we know that in the last 12 months 1 in 3 owners have switched compared to 1 in 5 renters. This means that switching rates for renters are significantly below average and many of these customers will be on default tariffs which can be expensive.



OFGEM motivations for switching



Summary

Our homes are at the centre of our lives, especially now, with so many of us spending more time indoors because of the pandemic and, for some, continuing to work from home more permanently in the future. Our homes should be warm, comfortable, and affordable to heat – but for many, this is not the case. Rising energy costs, low incomes and inefficient homes are restricting people's options and leaving them with impossible decisions over whether to heat their home, put food on the table or pay the rent.

Initially, energy-efficient technology can increase the cost of maintaining comfort levels, with the burden falling especially hard on low-income residents already recovering from the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis. It is important to consider how you will address tenants' ability to pay for heating and how the usage of new technology will impact on affordability and physical and mental wellbeing.

Living in a cold home can cause chronic illnesses, which may lead to reduced mobility and falls for older people, and heart attacks, strokes, respiratory and depression for the general population. The quality of the indoor environment at home can significantly impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing; poor air quality, temperatures that are too hot or too cold, and mould and damp are all detrimental to health. Old and inefficient housing leads to an estimated 11,500 early winter deaths and 4,000 early deaths from overheating per year and is costing the NHS in England £1.36bn every year in hospital and primary care.



Health and energy affordability

Alongside climate change, the affordability of energy and the issue of fuel poverty have emerged as issues of social significance in recent years. According to the updated and simplified ‘fuel poverty metric’: Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE), which has replaced the original Low Income High Cost (LIHC), (link), a household in England is said to be in fuel poverty if:

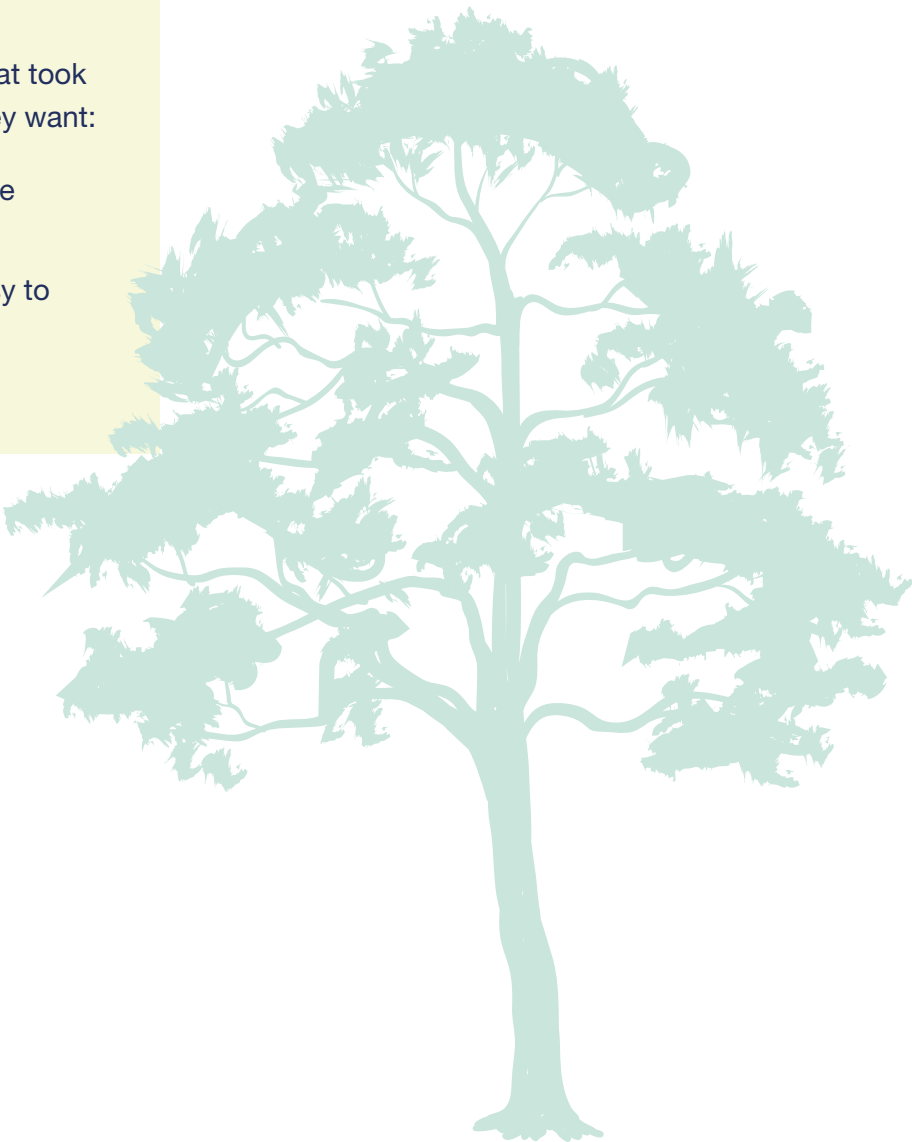
- It has a residual income below the poverty line (after accounting for required fuel costs) and
- It has an energy efficiency rating below EPC band C.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland still largely use the old definition: that a person is living in fuel poverty if, to heat their home to a satisfactory standard, they need to spend more than 10 per cent of their household income on fuel.

Government has set a target for all fuel-poor homes to be upgraded to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band C by 2030 and as many homes as possible to be EPC band C by 2035 where practical, cost effective and affordable. Currently 19 million UK homes fall below EPC band C, so at least 1.2 million homes must be retrofitted each year to reach the 2035 target.

When asked about what is most important to them, customers that took part in this research said that they want:

- their homes to be a comfortable temperature
- new heating systems to be easy to use to achieve this and
- utility bills to be affordable



This research with 900 customers uncovered that one in four households have gone without heating in the past 12 months to save money.

These figures make sober reading. The pandemic has made the past 18 months especially tough, with younger customers appearing to be struggling the most in dealing with a host of social and economic

issues. The households that have gone without heating in the past 12 months are more likely to be renting a home that falls into the lower EPC category.

“It’s a fact that people with money can make choices. People without money simply lack options. Fuel poverty affects millions”
– Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit

Around four million UK households are in the vicious circle of fuel poverty, which can have a significant impact on mental health and is a known risk factor for suicide. Research from National Energy Action’s (NEA) UK fuel poverty monitor 2019-2020 highlights how the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has been ‘unparalleled’ for fuel-poor households and those that support them. There has been the inevitable increase in energy use due to more people spending more time at home, and:

- A reduction in income, as many jobs were either lost or placed on furlough
- Increased affordability issues and debt, leading to energy rationing
- Reductions in smart meter/ECO installations
- Difficulties in accessing support, especially where households were digitally excluded or spoke English as an additional language. This resonates with the findings from conversations with Orbit customers, whereby BAME customers expressed more concern over issues regarding climate change.

What are the solutions?

The updated fuel poverty strategy states that households living in EPC band C properties will no longer be considered fuel poor under LILEE; however, this will not affect eligibility for current policies. We are expecting the new definition to impact on the Warm Home Discount in future. We may see some customers currently in receipt of the rebate not receiving it in future, exacerbating affordability issues.

Upgrading the energy efficiency of homes addresses one of the root causes of fuel poverty, but plans to retrofit properties need to reflect customer priorities and their daily struggles.

The research shows that highly energy efficient homes have significantly lower bills - and a significantly lower proportion therefore of take-home pay is spent on home heating - but how we invest in a net zero carbon future needs to remain affordable for all customers and stakeholders. To date, low carbon technologies have often lacked the scale required to be delivered at an affordable price, and some schemes and financial

incentives have involved a degree of complexity that has led to very low take up. The Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution and the Energy White Paper both recognise the importance of ensuring those on lower incomes are not left behind, but critically, the timing of the clean energy and net zero transition could result in higher bills. Financial tools and incentive mechanisms must be lean, clean and simple. We must also deal quickly with the paradox that, in many instances, lower-income households are occupying the hardest to heat homes and will therefore be paying proportionally the most in tax and fuel.

“There is a pressing need to protect low income and vulnerable households against any short-term shocks in energy prices. Get decarbonisation wrong and the fuel poverty crisis that is already a reality for many customers could be further accelerated.

“We need a proper conversation that brings together housing providers, energy suppliers, technologists, customers and the Government, which tackles the potential short and long-term cost implications.”

- Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit

Taking practical steps

The housing sector needs to think about the challenge of affordability when considering the cost of the retrofit programme. While accepting that the UK's housing stock is old and energy inefficient, Orbit's experience shows there are many practical actions that housing associations can take that will make a big difference.

In 2018, Orbit launched its Healthy, Happy Starts Campaign, in partnership with the Child Poverty Action Group, to directly address the issue of affordability. It listened to children and parents to understand the challenges they faced. Energy costs were identified then as being in the top three of household costs and, for many of the poorest families, there is a daily choice to be faced between 'eat' or 'heat'.

“Practical steps make a huge difference. Often these are the simplest things, small, quick-win interventions which make a real and tangible impact. That's what we need to consider when thinking about our retrofit plans. How can we help our customers in practical ways that have a real difference to their quality of life, and which eradicates – rather than exacerbates – the choice between 'eat' or 'heat'.

"A direct example of this working in practice is Orbit's decision to provide furniture packs for those struggling financially, or giving advice about money management and sustainable employment. This is because poverty is defined not just by levels of income, but access to amenities and social networks."

- Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit



RESEARCH FINDINGS

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING



There is a lack of general understanding about the concept of net zero carbon

Although most customers had heard of the concept of net zero carbon, understanding is lower; **40%** of customers who were aware of net zero carbon were not clear about what it means.



17% of customers have never heard of “net zero carbon”
vs 32% BEIS Public Tracker. (Increases to 36% within 18-34 age range)

Those who had heard of it were asked to describe what it meant in terms of their behaviours/home ...



4/10 customers subsequently said they did not know what net zero carbon meant –
5/10 for renters and
2/10 for owners



27% of customers discussed transport / reduce travel / less use of cars, electric cars etc



21% discussed energy efficiency / reduced use of heating & electrics / use of more efficient appliances



19% discuss cleaner fuel / reduced fossil fuels / replacing gas boilers



18% discuss recycling and reducing waste – recycling food and waste / reuse as much as possible

Other customers have very different views as to what net zero carbon means. 27% stated that they believed it was linked to reducing transport use and more electric vehicles. 21% believed that net

zero carbon related to greater energy efficiency and 19% about reducing the use of fossil fuels; 18% of occupiers linked net zero carbon to greater recycling.

Our customers thoughts:

"We keep our heating down and use less electricity. We try and shop locally and use local produce. I walk everywhere."

"I don't understand how I can help with net zero carbon emissions - there is a lot of talk about it, but no one actually says what you can do to help. I could turn my heating down but don't plan on doing so!"

"To be honest we cannot put it into practice, we can only put waste into recycling. I would like more help to purchase an electric car."

"We all contribute to the amount of carbon, but the main enemy is the car, so we need more electric cars, I only use public transport, but I do have to eat."

"Net zero carbon means to help reduce the impact of fossil fuels around the home."

"They want every person to have a minimal carbon footprint - so you are not using diesel fuels, fossil fuels, carbon energy. You are using cleaner energy to reduce your carbon footprint. They want you to use less electricity - so turning your heating down, use smart meters."

"Trying to get everything electric such as electric cars."

"Try and use less electrical appliances as possible, try to ride the bus/bicycle as much as possible."

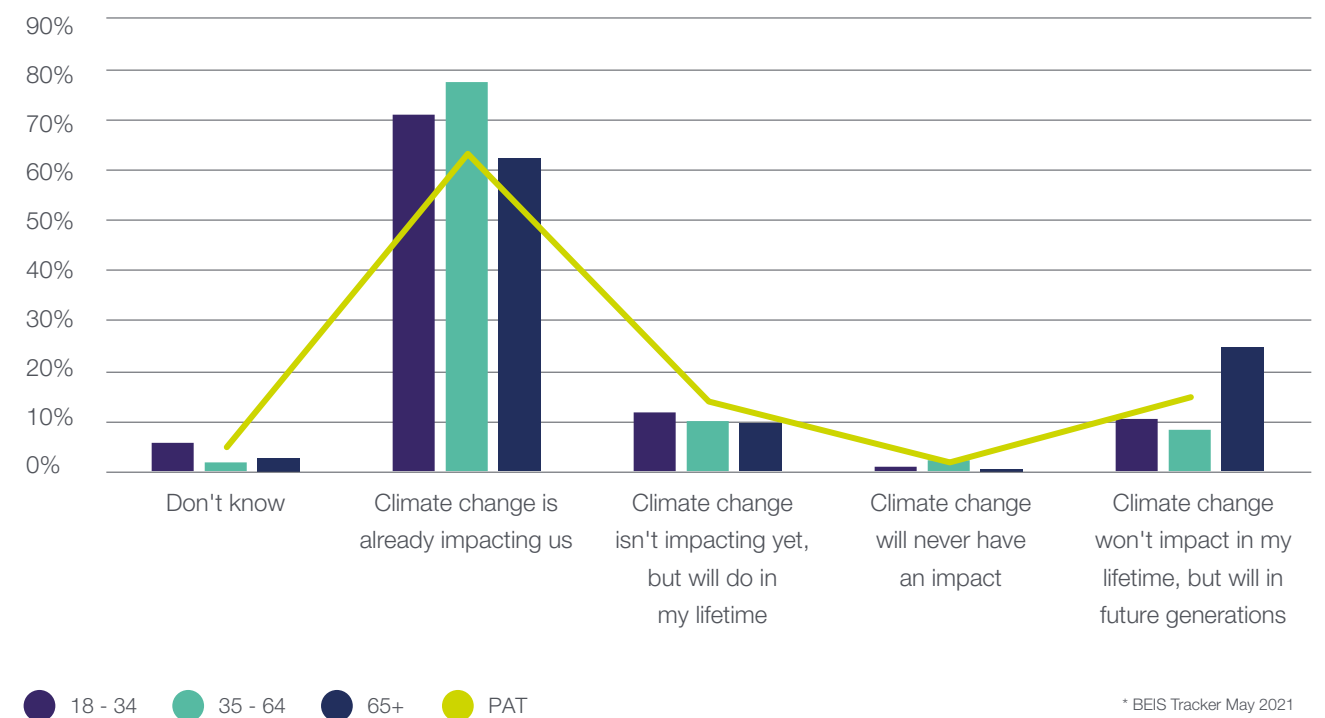
Customer awareness of climate change

73% of customers believe climate change is **already impacting them** – this compares to BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker results of **63% for general public**

The 73% is more likely to include:

- Owners (84% vs 70% renters)
- 35-64 year olds (78%)

Awareness



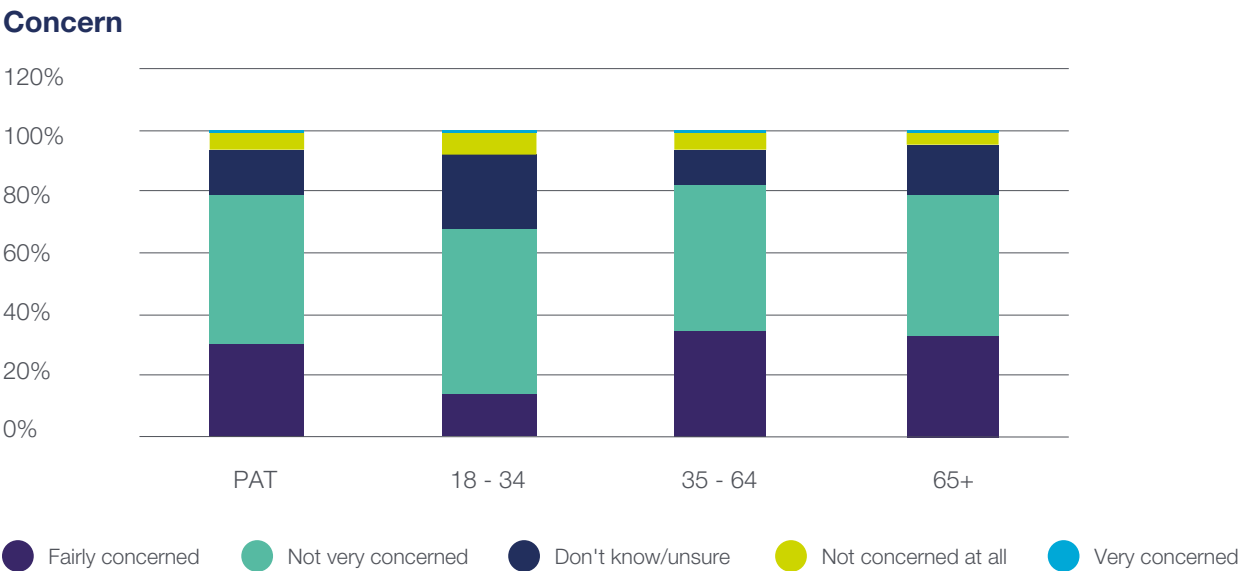
Customers are worried about climate change; 79% cite climate change as an issue, with older people, those with larger properties and homeowners more likely to be concerned. A significant finding is that Orbit's younger customers (18-34 years of age) appear less concerned about climate change which is interesting and not as expected. This may be

explained by the fact that this cohort of customers are experiencing multiple issues, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic* and therefore climate change is lower down the list of priorities. However, engaging with younger customers in a relevant way will be key to understand this difference to other consumer research.

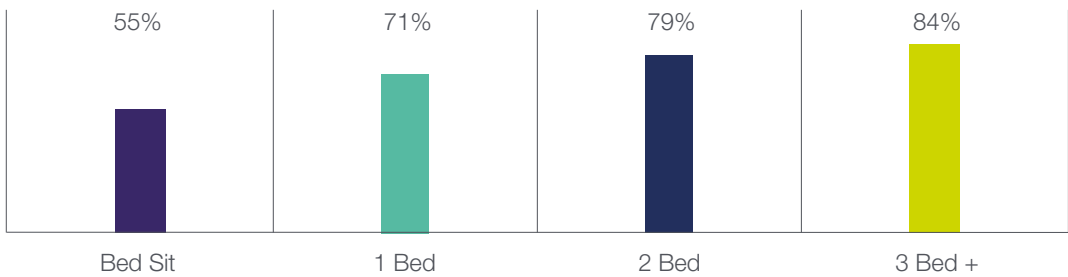
* Source: YouGov

Customer concern about climate change

79% of Orbit customers are **concerned** about climate change – comparable with the BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker results of **80% for general public**



Percentage concerned by climate change



- Property size seems to be an influencing factor but also links to age
- BAME customers are more concerned – 89% vs 77% (non BAME)
- Owners more concerned – 83%

73% already believe that climate change is affecting them today, with middle-aged people most likely to be concerned – older generations are most likely to believe that climate change will not affect them in

their lifetime. Very few customers (less than 2%) don't believe in climate change at all, indicating widespread acceptance that human activity is affecting the planet's climate.

Customer behaviours

Thinking about everyday life do you...



The 3 most common customer habits focused on the environment are:

- Reduce & recycle waste
- Save water around the house & garden
- Think about wider impact of products

Shopping local and spending time enjoying nature are also high on this list but mainly for non environmental reasons

5% of customers drive a hybrid/electric car (11% BEIS Public Attitudes tracker)

As a result of this widespread acceptance, people are already taking action to try and reduce their environmental impact and carbon footprint. Providing energy saving tips is a way to engage with what directly interests customers. Orbit is already helping customers understand how smart technologies measure heating and ventilation, via the customer handbook given to customers moving into their new home.

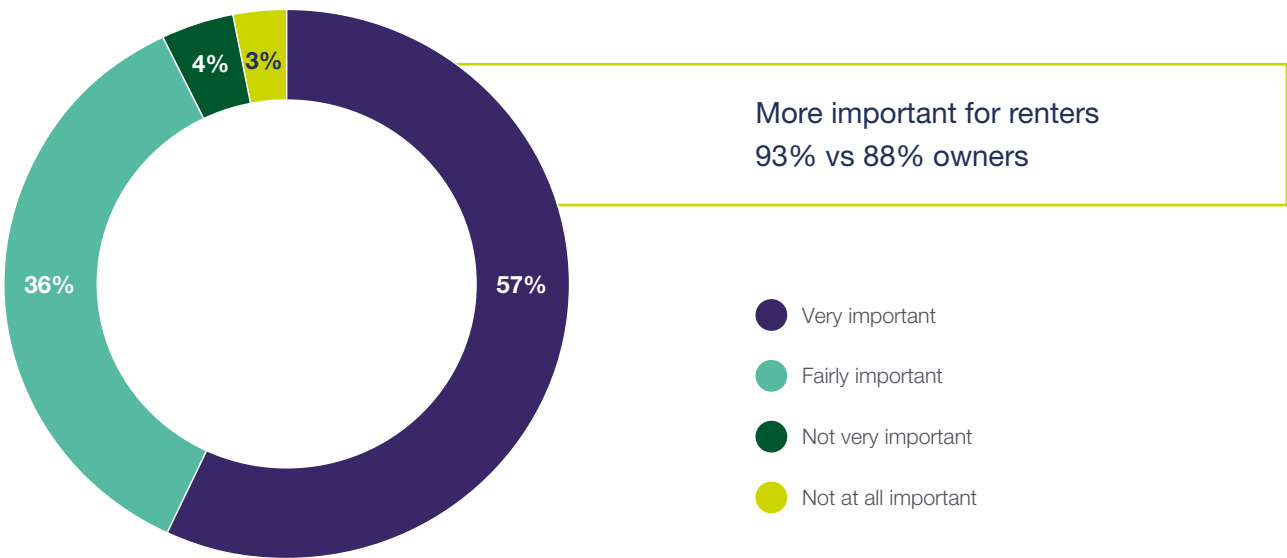
The most common environmental behaviours that customers undertake are to recycle, save water around

the home and consider the impact of the products that they buy. It is worth noting that there have been sustained communications and campaigns to embed these behaviours over a number of years. The research shows the customers do the right things if they know how to.

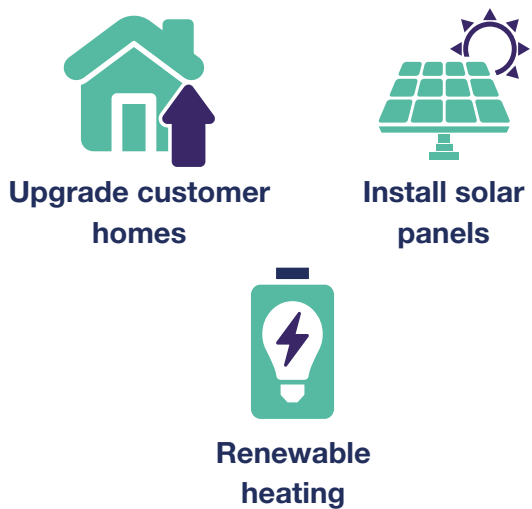
Customers also want to shop local and ensure they have access to enjoying green spaces and nature, though this behaviour is driven by non-environmental concerns.

Orbit's environmental footprint

Importance that Orbit makes decisions that are based on protecting the environment



How can Orbit be more environmentally friendly?



93% of customers believe that Orbit has a responsibility to make decisions that deliver a positive impact and protect the environment, a view which the wider sector should explore.

How can Orbit help customers act in a more environmentally friendly way?



Reflecting earlier concerns about energy costs and the home environment, they believe that Orbit should focus its environmental efforts on upgrading homes, greening estates and installing solar panels and renewable heating. Customer comments show a practical understanding of several aspects of environmental improvement.

In what ways do you think that Orbit could and help to limit climate change?

- “Less paper based communication, more use of email.”
- “Plant trees on new estates and incorporate hedgehog runs and things to enhance local wildlife.”
- “Making use of things that are accessible and more within our own country, so we support our own environment.”
- “Install solar panels on roofs. Helps to keep bills down and draws less energy from the power stations.”
- “Could have an electric charge point within the communal area for electric vehicles.”
- “Doing their part and encouraging tenants and households to do their part as well.”
- “Asking tenants what they think would be appropriate.”
- “They could put solar panels on all their houses. They could plant more trees and put more things in place to handle waste (i.e. designated places on estates to recycle/upcycle waste) or fit water butts.”
- “Using suppliers and contractors that have an environmentally and ethically sound policy.”
- “By educating people to be aware of what it takes to produce water, the electricity involved, and importance of recycling in general.”
- “I think they could help us with information and help us understand climate change.”
- “Green space for growing vegetables.”
- “Nicer greener spaces around new build homes, proper green spaces like a meadow turf to encourage wildlife.”

Providing customers with insight and information

Given their high engagement on climate issues, customers are keen to get further information about what Orbit is doing to improve the environment.

What customers wish to be kept informed about

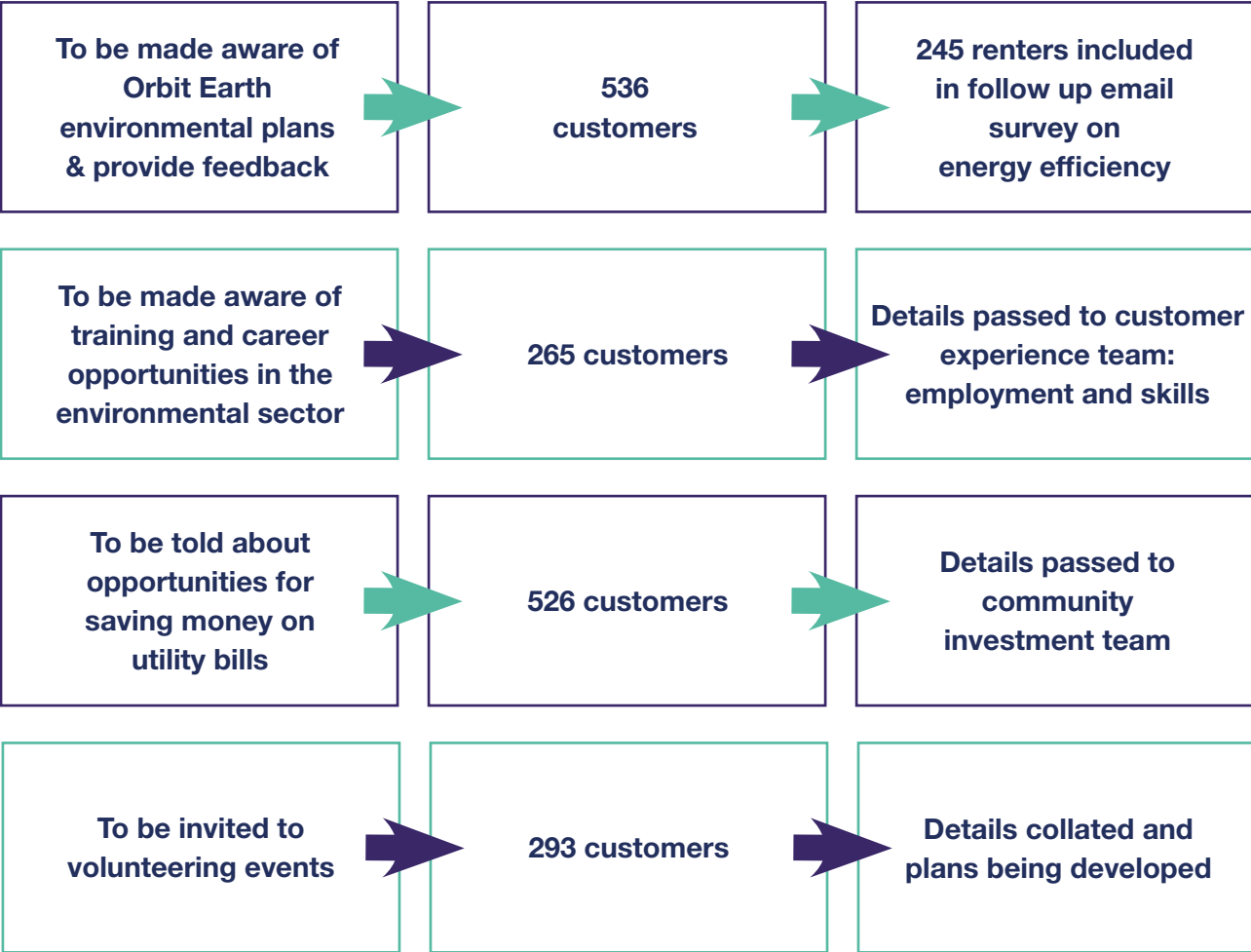


77% of customers want to know about the environmental, financial, health and wellbeing, and comfort benefits, with 76% keen to understand the benefits to the wider community.

Given the cost pressures that many face, 58% of customers are keen to be told about opportunities for how they can save money on their utility bills.

“It is not our role to preach. That’s why we prioritise listening to our customers to understand what’s important to them. We need to ensure adequate and relevant information is provided in a format that is accessible and easily digestible for customers.”
– Charley Gibbons, Director of Customer Experience at Orbit

Customers wanting to engage further with Orbit



Customers tell us that they’re not just interested in receiving information but also wish to proactively engage on the issues that matter to them. 59% of customers surveyed want to see environmental plans and provide feedback, while 32% of customers want to be invited to volunteering events.

The desire to get involved goes further for some; 29% of customers want to be made aware of training or career opportunities in the environmental sector; this demonstrates the positive role that housing associations can play in generating community interest in environmental issues.

“To meet net zero carbon will require a huge influx of new skills and jobs, many of which will be new roles that don’t exist today. This creates a great opportunity for our customers and for those of the wider sector to be part of the new, net zero carbon world, and where we can, we’ll support our communities in harnessing opportunities.”
– Charley Gibbons, Director of Customer Experience at Orbit

Research summary

The research highlights that customers are aware of climate change issues and, in many cases, already taking action to try and address it. Customers expressed high levels of interest in receiving more information and contributing to future discussions about the decarbonisation agenda. They want to reduce waste, recycle water and understand how to make their properties more efficient. The challenge is to how harness that enthusiasm through engagement and community programmes.

“Engaging with and informing customers about the global net zero carbon agenda is a critical way in which we can help customers behave in a more environmentally friendly way.

"Our customer base is already motivated to reduce their impact on the environment, and it's clear to see that customers expect us to be doing our part."
- David March, Head of Environmental Sustainability

As a sector, we must work with customers to promote awareness about retrofit work, to empower tenants to feel optimistic and proficient in using new technology, which in turn will encourage adoption of further measures to improve the energy efficiency of their home without it feeling completely intrusive. We must encourage stronger dialogue and engagement, and involve as many people as possible - including ‘harder to reach’ groups - with digital communications, door-to-door engagement and community events, speaking to all members of the community and age groups.

Providing energy saving tips is a way to engage with what directly interests customers. But hitting the right tone and giving the right level of information will be key, and the sector's role is to understand what customers think and keep them informed.

Methods of communication

Customers portray mixed preferences when it comes to methods of communication, between using the website and contacting call centres.

- 47% of customers would use Orbit's website.
- 27% would call the Call Centre for more information about the environment.

About half (47 per cent) stated that they would check the website for the most up-to-date information on their home and the environment, highlighting the importance of digital channels in decarbonisation communications.

The lack of understanding around net zero carbon terminology, with 40% of customers who were aware of the term net zero carbon not being clear about what it means, highlights the importance of avoiding jargon in communications. We must ensure that communication and engagement on the issue of climate change, energy affordability and retrofit work is clear and consistent and accessible to every customer, from start to finish.

We must also not underestimate the importance of our call-centres, the second most popular method of communication. Training for customer service teams is key. We should be aiming for our employees to be confident enough for conversations to flow naturally. And for our customers to confident in the information provided to them about work in their home, nearby green spaces or in the wider community. This also applies to housing management employees, repairs and maintenance operatives, and any other customer-facing members of employees.

Engaging in Retrofit

Research from Anglia Ruskin University found an increase in ‘feeling responsible for the environment’

when tenants were engaged throughout a retrofit programme.

The Energy Agency Scotland recently conducted an evaluation project to investigate the potential benefits of Solid Wall Insulation. Residents reported having more pride in their homes and community and would have people over to visit, reducing social isolation and promoting a sense of wellbeing.

Being proactive in customer engagement and asking customers what could be done to make way for more uptake of retrofit work will allow the needs and concerns of customers to be prioritised and help to avoid compromises on the work required. By engaging

in the very early stages, customers will be able to ask questions and feel empowered, raise concerns that may not have been considered and allow for strategies to be customer-led.

Taking practical steps

When planning for net zero carbon homes and designing retrofit plans, housing providers have three opportunities to implement the voice of the customer: at design stage, during installation and build and when in use.

A collaborative approach allows for feedback to be incorporated into elements such as the fabric-first approach, through to the location and specification of the energy efficient heating system which will ensure proper use and ease of maintenance.

From the survey responses taken from CIH's “It's Not Okay” guide to tackling stigma, some tenants highlighted that they do not feel listened to nor do housing providers act on their concerns from issues in the home, to concerns about their neighbourhoods and communities. It is crucial that customers have influence and

involvement in decarbonisation plans so that they feel in control of the work being planned for their home.

Trust plays a multi-faceted role in the way in which customers within social housing view and experience the installation of retrofit measures. How repairs have been approached in the past may make them doubt whether retrofit measures will be carried out effectively, therefore, it is important to get this right from the offset.

Aftercare is just as important as the design and installation stages. Housing providers should continue to engage, ask questions, gather feedback, and learn together with customers throughout the occupation of the homes to ensure confident long-term behavioural change in maintenance and use of new technology.

SOCIAL HOUSING AND RETROFIT



'Net zero carbon' refers to achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. There are two routes to achieving net zero carbon which work together: reducing existing emissions and actively removing greenhouse gases.

For the social housing sector, reaching net zero carbon means:

- Retrofitting existing homes to improve their energy efficiency and making their power and heating sources renewable
- Building new homes that are designed to be 'net zero carbon' and deliver this aim
- Decarbonising their own business operations. Housing providers can commit further to the net zero carbon agenda through their wider business strategy by investing in more green space, promoting the use of electric vehicles and by ensuring office spaces are low-carbon and sustainable
- Challenging and supporting the supply chain to also reach net zero carbon

A positive aspect of new build homes is that net zero carbon requirements can be planned for in advance. It is also important the sector plans for what happens to the homes that already exist and are occupied. These homes play an integral part in meeting the decarbonisation goals set out by the Government but will only do so effectively if landlords and residents work together to understand the implications of the technology they use and how to achieve the benefits that it is intended to deliver.

The current picture

It is generally agreed that it is more cost and energy-effective to retrofit even the oldest, leakiest homes than to knock them down and build new ones.

The UK has around 28 million homes, most of which require retrofit work. Heating Britain's homes accounts for about 14% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, a number that has barely budged in the past decade. The task is urgent because while the ultimate target is net zero carbon by 2050, half of this reduction must be achieved by 2030 if climate goals are to be met.

Our homes use 35% of all energy in the UK. Retrofit is an integrated approach to transforming the energy needs and technical systems in our homes, which requires quality in design, installation, and customer care, providing economic, social, and environmental benefits. Improving the energy efficiency of a home can significantly reduce household energy bills and mitigate the health risks associated with living in a cold home.

While the research in this publication would suggest that awareness of the climate change agenda is high and concern is widespread, real understanding of the topic is very mixed. Of the 900 participants interviewed, 17% stated they had never heard of 'net zero carbon'. Public awareness of the importance of climate change and education on how we can tackle it must continue to be raised dramatically, so that people back the programme and invest in their own homes to help ramp up delivery targets. Organisations will need to embed awareness and educational sessions for employees, so that individuals and teams can be very clear in their own minds what it means, allowing the education to start with them and filter through to customers and tenants.

Planning retrofit with tenants in an uncertain climate – the whole house retrofit approach

Torus, based in St Helens, are one of the largest housing providers in their region with 1,500 employees, managing around 40,000 homes and serving 75,000 customers. They have recently invested £3.2 million into helping 337 of their existing homes in Liverpool become more environmentally friendly. Torus are aware that many of their tenants are experiencing hardship as a result of the pandemic and by investing in the RetroFIT for the FUTURE project, they are committed to maximising income by reducing fuel poverty and actively looking at a range of ways to help tenants manage their energy use, with support for tenants to ensure that they understand and know how best to use the products and measures that have been installed in their homes.

Current thinking is that, where doable, social landlords may aim for whole house retrofits. Whole house retrofit ensures that a property operates in as energy-efficient a manner as possible, with all aspects of the building complementing each other, and in a recent report from Tpas and PlaceShapers, customers involved in the discussion expressed how they would rather a 'whole house approach' is used, not a piecemeal one.

Research carried out for the Green Building Council, 'Understanding how to motivate whole house retrofit', found that most householders are attracted to the idea of whole house retrofit plan once it is properly explained to them, especially the benefit of knowing upfront how to sequence measures and ensure forward compatibility. Those contemplating more extensive works indicated they would willingly pay for the service.

The Retrofit Academy pros of whole house retrofit:

- A property that complies fully with PAS 2035.
- An energy-efficient home.
- A home that's in good repair.
- A home where damp is eliminated.
- A property with excellent ventilation which is also easy to temperature control.
- Good air quality and a healthy home.

But is Whole House Retrofit the answer?

There are 28 million residential properties in the UK in total and 4 million homes in the housing sector. So, for the UK to reach its net zero carbon emissions target by 2050, a million properties need to be retrofitted each year. To hit this target the property and construction industry needs to be working at scale to very clear standards and measures to define what constitutes a net zero carbon home.

"There's a lot to do, especially when you consider the variety of dwellings within the UK, which adds very significant complexity, and the sheer demand on skills and technology, which isn't yet in place at anywhere near the scale required to enable us to achieve this."
- Ted Pearce, Director of Strategic Asset Management at Orbit

There is also a significant green skills gap within the UK construction sector and a current lack of industry capacity and capability to deliver energy-efficient homes at pace and scale.

"If we poured money into capital investment in retrofitting homes at this exact moment in time, we risk simply pushing prices up due to scarce resources. Smart investment and well-timed procurement are needed. There is also a problem with capacity and capabilities within the wider supply chain. The complexity of the task means that skills need to be addressed. We need to plan ahead and create the skills and materials needed to ensure this is a success." - Ted Pearce

The experience gained from Orbit's pilot project underway in Stratford-on-Avon has helped identify the processes required and the barriers which remain in place for a national project to deliver energy efficient homes at pace and at scale.

For example, something as familiar and straightforward as an external insulation install on terraced homes can often have consequences for access through the passageways that often exist between properties, limiting access for wheelchair users and parents with prams. Further more, even though external wall insulation is tried and tested there is no 'permitted development right' to these works, potentially creating planning delays.

A simple fix might be to class 'approved' energy efficiency related work as permitted development to ease the process.

What we can't do is just dispose of properties because they cannot meet energy efficiency targets. That's just shifting the problem rather than addressing it. For example, the oldest heritage properties within Orbit's portfolio are key to placemaking and to get these properties to net zero carbon looks like an impossibility. But what Orbit might be able to do, recognising the heritage and placemaking value of these assets, is to look to the really intelligent use of materials and ultimately a sensitive offsetting strategy.



We benefit from a huge variety of architectural styles and building techniques in the UK. But with this comes challenges. Retrofitting a traditional Cotswold-stone property or a thatched cottage will have different challenges to a brick-built or a timber frame home. We need to create an individual property passport to highlight specific issues which need to be addressed in retrofitting each home and, as we face these challenges, it's essential that we share the learnings made across the industry.

But the sector cannot afford to sit around waiting. Largely, we know what we must do; housing providers are and must grasp the issue and devise and implement their own strategies. This will require planning their own delivery framework and direction of travel for their stock, subject to change, depending on whether government mandates more ambitious targets or not. It is important to develop a target and reassess budgets for your organisation, as Hackitt and other priorities are putting quite considerable cost pressures on the sector.

Policymakers must be realistic about the capacity of local supply chains and consult with those involved in delivering changes. Organisations must look to take a longer-term approach that builds capacity, and / or consider more pilot or demonstration projects as the 2050 target is not far away. It is crucial to take a strategic approach to embed sustainability into your organisations now, working out the implications for materials, skills and monitoring the process.



So, what's the answer?

While the Government has been vocal on its commitments to a green recovery, a major ramp-up of funding commitments and the creation of a national retrofit strategy are needed to embed firm foundations to scale and meet the volume of work required, covering education, skills, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. Ministers committed to scaling up the fitting of heat pumps in existing homes, initially making between £500m and £2bn available for the work across all housing stock through the Clean Heat Grant, Green Homes Grant and Home Update Grant.

However, in March 2021, the Green Homes Grant closed early due to administrative mishaps, further highlighting the gaps in available and sufficient funding and policy clarity.

We are asking the Government to use the upcoming Autumn Spending Review as an opportunity to commit to social housing modernisation, reduce carbon emissions and create jobs and opportunities for people.

The £3.8bn Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund could help meet the cost of bringing all homes in the sector up to EPC band C over the next decade.

The CCC estimate that 40% of this money would contribute to upgrades in households currently facing fuel poverty, but would not stretch to pay for further low-carbon heat investments without another £4bn becoming available to 2030.

We need public policy, the UK construction industry and the housing sector to work closely together to create the right market supply and demand conditions and generate long-term public confidence in the retrofitting homes agenda.

If this is managed correctly, it presents an exciting business opportunity, maybe even a kind of new industrial revolution. The impact of warmer homes on the rest of the economy could be considerable, from improvements in public health and its impact on NHS demand to a potential reduction in energy demand from the grid, which may well mean that the UK's energy infrastructure needs less investment.

"When considered in the context of the potential damage that climate change is bringing and will continue to bring at an accelerated pace if we do nothing, the case for change is compelling. Surely from a 'UK plc' perspective, we just cannot afford not to do this." - Ted Pearce, Director of Strategic Asset Management at Orbit

STRATFORD- ON-AVON DECARBONISATION PROJECT



This £3.6 million project, which has received £1.45 million in government funding, is making 69 homes in the Stratford area more energy efficient. The project provides a vivid illustration of the practical challenges and costs of achieving net zero carbon emissions.

“This project involves a large programme of works in one go. It commits to a whole house retrofit while customers remain living in their home. There is a hassle factor for customers as the energy efficiency measures we install include external wall insulation, floor insulation, replacing doors and windows as well as new systems.

“So far, no-one has dropped out of the project or complained about the complexity involved. Customers are looking forward to the benefits of a warmer, more affordable home and addressing the problems of draughty doors, damp and mildew.

“Planning and communication is key. Critical to the customer is what will the changes look like, how does itechnology such as smart thermostats, work, and will energy bills be more affordable.”

- Jeanette Hodges, Head of Carbon and Operations at Orbit

Looking after our built heritage is also a concern. The project includes a mix of 69 properties in an area with 75 designated conservation areas, areas of outstanding natural interest and over 3,000 listed buildings. Therefore, planning has had to be approached with sensitivity to the streetscape. In many cases there is the need for full planning permission which can cause a 12-week delay and associated increased costs.

Critical to success is carrying out the works in the right order. The project, which got underway in the early months of 2021, begins with a thorough property assessment by a retrofit assessor, who then provides the retrofit coordinator with all the necessary information to create a medium to long-term individual plan for the property. It prioritises the work to be done and provides the homeowner with tailored advice

“There are real-life challenges to be overcome, such as poorly fitted conservatories and ‘lean to’s, small passageways running between properties that make external wall insulation impossible, and planning conditions resulting in the need for brick effect render or brick slips.”

Orbit’s role is to be a facilitator and make the entire process of being energy efficient easier. One consequence observed is that, because affordability issues are eased, customers can tend to leave the heating on for longer or turn the levels up higher, which can mean there is then little change in the cost of their heating bills. This will be monitored at the end of the project as well as seeking to understand the different ways in which customers understand or interpret thermal comfort.

“A hugely important element of the project is explaining and providing support on the systems we are installing, for example smart thermostats, and ensuring that the technology and the advice provided is tailored, intuitive and simple.”

The Stratford-on-Avon social housing demonstrator project is one of 19 projects around the country, but this is one of the very few which has been launched from scratch in 2021.

The average cost of the retrofit works in the trial, which includes insulation and ventilation, is £40,000 for each individual property. The annual energy demand for each of these newly insulated properties is targeted at 50 kWh per metre squared per annum, a 75% reduction on the annual figure for the average Orbit home.

The lessons being learned from this pilot project are significant, particularly on how to scale up the work and drive economies of scale. The supply chain is under particular stress as a result of the pandemic, BREXIT and a number of government funded and large projects, such as HS2, coming together at the same time. Planning permission has been identified as a stumbling block, and changes to VAT are needed when compared to the tax breaks for new builds. There are also growing problems in identifying steady and secure funding. Baseline modelling indicates that £600 million may be required to retrofit the entire Orbit property portfolio to these energy efficient standards. This will all need to be achieved in a volatile market.

“But we can say with confidence there are clear and positive benefits from creating a simple and set process for retrofitting homes which prioritises tailored communication with our customers.”

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



A focus on customer affordability

Energy affordability is a critical issue for customers already struggling with their heating and energy bills.

Energy affordability is one aspect of fuel poverty and it is one that customers have limited control over at the present time.

The policy angle here is key. With the cost of decarbonisation currently being largely applied to electricity, there is a race to sufficiently increase the energy efficiency of homes to counteract the higher cost of energy on a per kWh basis where the fuel is switched from gas to electricity. We need Government to ensure a fair playing field between electricity and

gas utility prices, and plans to retrofit properties need to reflect customer priorities and their daily financial struggles.

There is a pressing need to protect low income and vulnerable households against short-term shocks in energy prices as well as longer term costs associated with upgrading insulation and installing low-carbon heating systems. It is important to focus on the balance between the affordability of warmth and the necessity to reduce our carbon footprint at the same time.

“We need a proper conversation that brings together housing providers, energy suppliers, technologists and the Government which tackles the potential short and long-term cost implications for the customer.”

– Paul Richards, Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit

Supporting this, we need to focus on making many more of our customers aware of how to switch providers in order to cut their energy bills. Only 22% of Orbit’s customers have switched energy suppliers in the past 12 months, well below the national average.

CIH and Orbit recommend:

- Government considers current energy pricing policy, including the price cap, to make sure that the transition to electricity only is affordable
- Government does further work to understand the short and long-term costs to customers of moving to net zero carbon
- For Government to work closely with the social housing sector to target specific areas of fuel poverty
- Proactive work with customers and tenants to help them switch to more cost effective and greener tariffs
- In order to be effective, communications about switching suppliers and tariffs should focus on the ability to save money rather than highlight negatively perceived terms such as fuel poverty

Collaborating as a sector

The UK housing sector needs to come together to provide customers with a common vision and a compelling narrative towards a net zero carbon future.

As we face these challenges, it’s essential that we share the learnings made across the industry.

It should highlight the issues of both the short-term energy price increases and the long-term additional costs for customers, but also address how best to create a roadmap to net zero carbon.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the competing and costly demands being placed on housing associations, such as the pressing issue of addressing building safety, it is important that the UK housing sector crafts a compelling narrative relevant to the environment, and – as with other industries - makes firm commitments to decarbonise its operations and supply chains.

David March, Head of Environmental Sustainability at Orbit, which is preparing to publish its own net zero carbon roadmap later this year, comments: *“We need to ensure that we are reducing our environmental impact not just across our portfolio of homes, but also in our operations and the homes we build. At Orbit, our housing portfolio only contributes a third of the group’s total emissions - our construction operations, for instance, have a significant carbon footprint and produce thousands of tonnes of waste a year.*

Our operations, supply chain and construction all need to be considered – we must take a holistic view in the transition to net zero carbon.”

There would be a real benefit in coming together as a sector to create a roadmap, which supports organisations to make specific and dated commitments to decarbonise all activities within the sector.

Developing common standards and software to measure the sector’s carbon footprint, and an agreed approach to developing the right mix of renewable heating technologies which encompasses all emerging technologies, are just two practical examples of what could be possible.

Part of our role must also be to look beyond mitigation measures and consider positive things we can do to adapt to climate change.

While sector focus is on tackling the challenge of retrofitting homes, as landlords and developers, the sector is also responsible for a sizable land portfolio. There is an opportunity to consider the positive actions which can be taken to counteract the effect of climate change with biodiversity

CIH and Orbit recommend:

Cross-sector collaboration to accelerate the transition to net zero carbon and wider environmental change could cover:

- Working alongside government to develop a flexible mix of renewable heating technologies to include the full range of emerging and innovative technologies which can accelerate the decarbonisation of UK homes
- Developing a roadmap and best practice sharing to support organisations to make decarbonisation commitments across operations, supply chain and construction
- Developing common net zero carbon standards and software to measure the sector’s total carbon footprint
- Improving air quality, climate resilience and the wellbeing of customers by an enhanced focus on biodiversity in communal outdoor areas
- Leveraging the sectors combined buying power to ensure cost-efficient solutions and adoption of complementary net zero carbon commitments by the supply chain



Taking practical steps

Making urban spaces greener and increasing biodiversity came out as something customers want to see.

“Part of our role must also be to look beyond mitigation measures and consider positive things we can do to counter climate change. Enhancing green and blue spaces, increasing planting and supporting biodiversity are key actions that we can take now, and are a key objective of our sustainability programme, Orbit Earth.

“As part of this we have a partnership with the Wildlife Trusts. This work has included the creation of a ‘Wildlife Outside Your Window’ pack for customers, designed to connect customers with nature and encourage them to enhance biodiversity in their own private outdoor spaces.

“We are also undertaking a pilot project with the Wildlife Trusts across four representative estates to explore how we can enhance the biodiversity of the communal outdoor areas of our existing communities by developing a manual of categorised Orbit estate habitats with suggested improvements.

“These detailed habitat surveys will help us to enhance the environment and make homes more enjoyable for our customers, with greater varieties of plant and animal wildlife.” – David March, Head of Environmental Sustainability, Orbit

Green spaces refer to vegetation; blue spaces refer to the visible surface waters of lakes, rivers and coastal water.

Customer engagement with net zero and further customer research

While public understanding of the concept of net zero carbon may be low, there is a potential opportunity to widen awareness of behaviours and choices that help our environment, by providing practical advice and guidance.

Supporting customers by providing information relevant to the net zero carbon agenda will be critical to enable customers to adopt more environmentally-friendly behaviours and help enable the UK housing sector to meet its net zero carbon targets.

Adequate and relevant information should be consistent and provided in a format that is accessible and easily digestible for customers. Customers have indicated that online is the most suitable channel of communication. Fundamental to this is the need

to work collaboratively and engage with customers throughout this process.

Additional qualitative and quantitative research is required to fully understand customer priorities around the net zero carbon agenda and develop more tailored approaches and engagement plans which speak to different customer groups.

Equally, additional efforts are needed to fully define the concept and agree on an inclusive definition of the net zero carbon agenda and its relevance to a clean, green environment with the wider public.

More exploration is needed as to how housing associations can support lowering the barriers to electric vehicle adoption by installing EV charging points in customer homes.

Internal training, addressing the green skills gap

Customers have expressed high levels of interest in receiving more information and contributing to future discussions about the environment. Carbon literacy training can help contact centre and customer-facing employees understand the net zero carbon agenda and its impact on customers.

There is a green skills gap within the UK construction sector. There is a lack of industry capacity and

capability to deliver energy-efficient homes at pace and scale. Additional action is required to stimulate the necessary supply and demand conditions which generate industry confidence in making significant investment in the retrofitting homes agenda. Further efforts should also be made to identify how we can create green skills opportunities for customers.

“To meet net zero carbon will require a huge influx of new skills and jobs, many of which will be new roles that don’t exist today. This creates a great opportunity for our customers to be part of the new, net zero carbon world, and we need to help them to harness these opportunities.” – Charley Gibbons, Director of Customer Experience at Orbit

CIH and Orbit recommend:

- The sector develops standardised training for customer-facing employees to cover net zero carbon transitions, wider environmental standards and energy efficiency advice
- Government focuses on urgently developing the green skills needed in order to support timely decarbonisation
- And finally, we are asking the Government to use the upcoming Autumn Spending Review as an opportunity to commit to funding social housing modernisation, reduce carbon emissions and create jobs and opportunities for people



Contributors

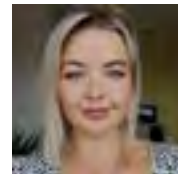


Charley Gibbons,

Director of Customer Experience at Orbit

Charley is responsible for ensuring customers help shape the services they use. His teams manage engagement and communications with customers and a range of services that create thriving communities.

He joined Orbit in March 2015 with a portfolio including strategy and brand, prior to that he worked in the voluntary sector with Citizens Advice. In 2018, alongside his colleague Jessica Marshall, he helped to launch the Orbit Earth programme.



Alexandra Gibson,

Policy and Practice Officer at the Chartered Institute of Housing

Alexandra is Policy and Practice officer at CIH and leads on sustainability, net zero carbon and retrofitting, as well as repairs and maintenance.



Jeanette Hodges,

Head of Carbon and Operations at Orbit

Jeanette has wide experience leading major transformation programmes. She chairs Orbit's Carbon Forum, set up to create a long-term roadmap for the business to help tackle its own carbon footprint.



David March,

Head of Environmental Sustainability at Orbit

David joined Orbit in January 2021 to lead the Group's environmental sustainability strategy. Prior to that, David was Group Environment Manager at ENGIE, leading the UK development of the energy utility's net zero carbon and zero waste strategies.

He is responsible for Orbit Earth which is a central part of Orbit's 2025 strategy and ESG approach. It seeks to drive the transition to net zero carbon across the Group and to enable our customers and supply chain to achieve the same. The programme also aims to enhance the quality and biodiversity of our outdoor spaces and to promote sustainable consumption of resources.



Ted Pearce,

Director of Strategic Asset Management at Orbit

Ted joined Orbit in 2016 having worked as a portfolio manager and chartered surveyor for some of the UK's biggest businesses, including BT, Barclays and Severn Trent Water, as well as founding his own specialist property consultancy. The importance of minimising the impact of construction on the environment has been an essential part of his career from the outset, with a number of commercial buildings commissioned by him being awarded the highest BREEAM ratings.

As an experienced asset and portfolio manager, he is motivated by the desire to create warm and affordable homes. His job is to create the right quality property portfolio to meet the changing and future needs of both the Orbit customer and the business.



Paul Richards,

Group Director of Customer and Communities at Orbit

Paul has worked successfully in customer-focused roles in both the public and private sectors. At Orbit he is responsible for maintenance and core operations as well as customer service.

Since joining Orbit in January 2016, Paul has prioritised improving Orbit's relationship with customers. In 2018 Paul also led Orbit's national campaign dedicated to tackling the issue of child poverty.



Gavin Smart,

Chief Executive at the Chartered Institute of Housing

Gavin Smart CIHCM is Chief Executive at the Chartered Institute of Housing. Prior to joining CIH, Gavin was Assistant Director of Research and Futures at the National Housing Federation from 2004 to 2012. Born in Cardiff, Gavin studied public administration at the Polytechnic of Wales and then gained an MSc in sociology at the University of Bristol, where he worked as a research associate on projects for the Department of the Environment, Housing Corporation, Scottish Office and local authorities

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing is the professional body for people who work in housing, the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. CIH has a diverse

membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world.

About Orbit

Orbit is one of the UK’s foremost housing groups, creating thriving communities within a growing portfolio of over 45,000 affordable and social rent homes largely throughout the Midlands, East and South of England. For over 50 years we’ve been a force for positive change, particularly during the country’s continuing housing and residential challenges.

We manage a portfolio of high quality, sustainable homes to over 100,000 customers in differing stages of life, from first timers to enhanced supported living, and are one of the largest builders of affordable homes in the UK.

Our vision is to lead in building thriving communities, and we believe everyone is entitled to a good quality home that they can afford in a place that they are proud to live.

We invest over £5 million each year in our communities to make a positive difference in people’s lives. Through our social value programme we work to create a better society, building affordable homes and doing business in more socially responsible and sustainable ways while lessening the impact we have on our environment, customers, employees, partners, suppliers, investors, and funders.

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