

# Protecting consumers on the way to net zero: deliberative research on the Just Transition

Report by Ipsos for the Utility Regulator





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# Executive summary

This report outlines findings from deliberative research carried out among a group of energy consumers in Northern Ireland to explore their views on a Just Transition and how it can be achieved within the context of decarbonising energy. It was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of the Utility Regulator as part of its work in protecting consumers on the way to net zero.

## Background and aims

In June 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Climate Change Act which set a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Act includes the principle of a Just Transition which focusses on achieving net zero fairly and in a way that ensures no one is left behind.

This research sought to explore consumers' expectations and concerns about the transition to net zero, their understanding of the principle of a Just Transition and how it could be achieved, and what actions they felt should be prioritised by UR as it supports the Just Transition. The findings of this research will support UR to develop its work in line with its statutory requirements and the expectations of its stakeholders including consumers.

## Methodology

A deliberative approach was chosen for this research due to the complex nature of the topic. Deliberative engagement puts people at the heart of decision making through informed discussions involving diverse perspectives. This approach supports the development of informed opinions, uncovers what underpins people's views, and demonstrates how views may change over time and in response to new information.

A deliberative workshop was carried out with 49 consumers, who met in person over a single day in Belfast in April 2025. They came together with the aim of answering these overarching research questions:

1. What aspects of the transition are you, as an energy consumer, most concerned about?
2. How can we make sure the transition is just and fair for consumers?
3. Who should pay for the changes that will be needed?

Over the course of the day consumers listened to presentations from two subject matter experts. They then deliberated on key concerns they had in relation to the changes needed to achieve a Just Transition, formed views on how the transition could be made fairer and deliberated on who should pay for the transition. A number of overarching themes emerged from the discussions, which are outlined below.

## **Concerns about cost, practicalities and lack of information**

From an early stage in the discussions, participants expressed concerns about the cost implications of reaching net zero. This included both the upfront costs of installing new energy systems such as heat pumps, which was perceived to be substantial, and the long-term running costs of these newer technologies.

There was further concern that consumers would be asked to continually change their heating system as technologies developed or government expectations changed. Concerns were also raised about the level of disruption to properties involved with changing heating systems, particularly for older and less energy-efficient homes. There was also some scepticism about the reliability of heat pumps and uncertainty about their effectiveness as a home heating source.

Participants also felt concerned about a lack of information about what actions they were being expected to take. There was a general sense of uncertainty about the costs, benefits, and available options, which participants felt was holding them back from making changes to their homes. The lack of clear communication about government expectations of consumers therefore left participants unsure about their obligations and best practices.

## **Lack of trust in government and the need for greater transparency**

Participants expressed a lack of trust in governments to achieve net zero targets and to ensure a Just Transition. It was felt that significant changes would be required to reach Northern Ireland's net zero target and that ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, particularly in the transport sector, could pose a barrier.

There was a desire for greater transparency from government about what the changes required might mean for consumers' households and how it would impact them. Clarity in guidelines about pricing structures and transparency in financial implications for consumers were deemed essential to building trust and confidence. It was felt that by having a clear understanding of what the transition involves, consumers can make informed decisions about adopting new technologies and energy-efficient practices.

There was also a call for increased transparency in the decisions taken by government and by the energy sector, including open communication about where public funds are allocated towards the net zero transition and how those decisions are made, to help build trust among consumers. By making these processes transparent, it was felt that the government can promote a culture of accountability and demonstrate its commitment to a fair transition.

## **Benefits of the transition were not always clear**

While some participants recognised the potential environmental and financial benefits of the transition to net zero, their discussion focussed more on the cost implications of the transition than on the benefits. There were calls for more information to be provided to consumers to make clear the benefits of the transition.

There was a sense that the transition was something that being “done to” consumers, with targets being set by government that will require consumers to take action and to pay. Among some participants there was a perception that consumers were being “forced” to make these changes that they otherwise would not have chosen to do. If this perceived forced change to cleaner energy comes at a cost to consumers, participants believed that government support would be required.

Participants therefore emphasised the importance of financial support to alleviate the cost burden associated with transitioning to net zero. The idea of government subsidies was frequently discussed, with participants advocating for programmes that would help offset the high upfront costs of installing renewable energy technologies like heat pumps and solar panels. However, some participants questioned whether the transition could ever be truly just, as there will always be some people who can afford changes more than others

### **Protecting the most vulnerable is a key aspect of a Just Transition**

Participants interpreted the principle of a Just Transition to mean an “equal transition” and an “equitable” approach. They emphasised the important of financial fairness in terms of who pays for the transition and how more vulnerable groups of society can be better supported to participate in the transition.

Participants believed that government, industry, and the public should share the financial burden of the transition to net zero, with the government taking the lead. There was a clear desire to protect vulnerable consumers and support those who might be impacted the most by the transition. Support for lower-income households or those unable to afford the costs of the transition, people with certain disabilities or health conditions, and private renters was seen as important. Ensuring affordability and preventing disproportionate burdens on these groups were seen as fundamental aspects of a Just Transition. Participants also emphasised the importance of non-price-based protections for vulnerable consumers. They highlighted the importance of keeping these consumers updated with relevant information about best practices, making the information accessible and ensuring it is from an independent body.

Discussions around potential systems of payment revealed the complexity of finding a fair approach, with participants identifying potential drawbacks of each of the hypothetical scenarios. Across each the potential pricing scenarios there was a strong sense that individual circumstances needed to be borne in mind.

### **Independent and accessible information**

Participants stressed the importance of having access to clear, transparent, and unbiased information, advocating for reliable sources such as independent government bodies or regulated agencies to provide this. One suggestion was establishing a “one-stop shop” or an independent body dedicated to providing impartial advice and support for consumers. This entity would serve as a reliable source of information, free from commercial interests, ensuring that consumers receive unbiased details about their choices.

# 1 Background and methodology

## 1.1 The policy context

In June 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Climate Change Act<sup>1</sup> which set a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Act includes the principle of a Just Transition which focusses on achieving net zero fairly and in a way that ensures no one is left behind. It is rooted in the principles of equity, participation and support, so that the outcome of net zero has shared benefits and supports social justice.

The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (Utility Regulator) is a non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating the electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries within Northern Ireland. The Utility Regulator (UR) seeks to advocate for the short and long-term interests of consumers. Its strategic objectives include:

- Supporting the Just Transition to net zero
- Securing Northern Ireland's energy supply and water and wastewater services
- Enabling "best in class" energy and water companies
- Providing the highest level of consumer service and protection

As part of its Corporate Strategy 2024-2029<sup>2</sup>, UR is seeking to understand how to deliver better outcomes for consumers in line with the Just Transition principles within the context of decarbonising the energy system in Northern Ireland.

## 1.2 Research objectives

Against the policy context outlined above, UR commissioned Ipsos to carry out deliberative research with energy consumers to explore their views on a Just Transition and how it can be achieved within the context of decarbonising energy in Northern Ireland. This research was carried out as part of UR's work in protecting consumers on the way to net zero.

This research sought to explore consumers' expectations and concerns about the transition to net zero, their understanding of the principle of a Just Transition and how it could be achieved, and what actions they felt should be prioritised by UR as it supports the Just Transition. The findings of this research will support UR to develop its work in line with its statutory requirements and the expectations of its stakeholders including consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Strategy | Utility Regulator (uregni.gov.uk)

## 1.3 Methodology

A deliberative approach was chosen for this research due to the complex nature of the topic. Deliberative engagement puts people at the heart of decision making through enabling informed discussions involving diverse perspectives<sup>3</sup>. A deliberative approach uncovers what underpins people's views and demonstrates how views may change over time and in response to new information.

A key strength of a large-scale deliberative event lies in the space it dedicates to informing participants about the topic and its ability to foster collective understanding. Unlike in-depth interviews, which capture individual perspectives in isolation, or focus groups, which are limited to a smaller group dynamic, a deliberative event brings together a diverse range of participants to engage in a structured discussion. Deliberative formats such as this one allow for dialogue between participants and subject matter experts, meaning questions can be raised and answered, allowing for a richer understanding of the various aspects of the topic. Dedicating sufficient time for engagement (an entire day in this case) allows participants to move beyond initial reactions and engage in deeper, more reflective discussions, explore multiple viewpoints, challenge assumptions, and co-create new insights that might not emerge from individual or small group settings.

Deliberative methods are particularly effective when seeking to address complex societal issues. Previous research<sup>4</sup> has highlighted that climate change is particularly well suited to deliberative approaches, since it can be a complex and potentially polarising topic to engage the public. Against this context, UR therefore sought a deliberative approach that would provide policymakers with an understanding of the public's perspective on how to pursue the Just Transition to net zero in the context of the decarbonisation of energy in Northern Ireland.

A deliberative workshop was carried out with 49 consumers, meeting in person over a single day in Belfast in April 2025. They came together with the aim of answering these overarching research questions:

- 1. What aspects of the transition are you, as an energy consumer, most concerned about?**
- 2. How can we make sure the transition is just and fair for consumers?**
- 3. Who should pay for the changes that will be needed?**

Over the course of the day consumers listened to presentations from two subject matter experts. They then deliberated on key concerns they had in relation to the changes needed to achieve a

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2024-03/Delib%20Best%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.climatechange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/understanding-and-engaging-the-public-on-climate-change.pdf>

Just Transition, formed views on how the transition could be made fairer and deliberated on who should pay for the transition.

### 1.3.1 Sampling and recruitment

The aim was to achieve a sample of at least 50 participants with over-recruitment to account for potential cancellations or drop-outs. In the end, 49 participants took part on the day (after some participants cancelled last minute). Participants from across Northern Ireland were recruited by a team of specialist recruiters. A screening questionnaire was used to capture demographic information about the participants, designed to help ensure the group's profile was broadly reflective of the Northern Ireland population. Quotas were set on various characteristics including gender, age, social class, location, disability (long term health problem or disability), ethnicity, and household heating source. A table summarising the demographic profile of the group can be found in Appendix A. To support and enable participation in the process, participants were given an incentive payment in line with industry standards.

### 1.3.2 Research materials

A discussion guide for the workshop and supporting stimuli were developed by Ipsos in collaboration with UR. Supporting presentations were developed by two subject matter experts. The first presentation provided an overview of the key concepts of climate change, net zero and the Just Transition. The second presentation provided information on the energy sector in Northern Ireland and the likely changes required to transition to net zero. Presentations were delivered live and specialists stayed to answer questions in a plenary setting following reflection from participants.

Stimuli were used to encourage participants to consider different impacts of the Just Transition to net zero. Fictional characters were developed by the research team and shared to help participants think about the potential impacts of the changes needed on different groups. These are summarised in Figure 1.1, and shown in more detail in Appendix B.

#### Figure 1.1: Fictional characters presented



**James and Emma** (42 and 40) live in Lisburn with their three children in a detached house, which they own. The home has high energy efficiency, with gas central heating, triple-glazed windows, loft and cavity wall insulation. They want to replace their gas heating system with a heat pump and add solar panels. Their combined annual income is £115,000.



**Mary and David** (75 and 76) live in a terraced house in Belfast, which they rent from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The house has an average level of energy efficiency. There is a draught from the front door, making the house colder. They cannot afford to use any more central heating, so want the draught fixed. Any changes to the property are the responsibility of the Housing Executive. Their combined annual income is £40,000.



**Lee** (36) lives with her daughter in a ground floor flat in Strabane, which she rents from a private landlord. The flat has very low energy efficiency, poor insulation and draughts. Lee occasionally needs to use portable electric heaters to stay warm but struggles to afford this. Any changes to the property are the responsibility of the landlord. Lee’s annual income is £22,000.



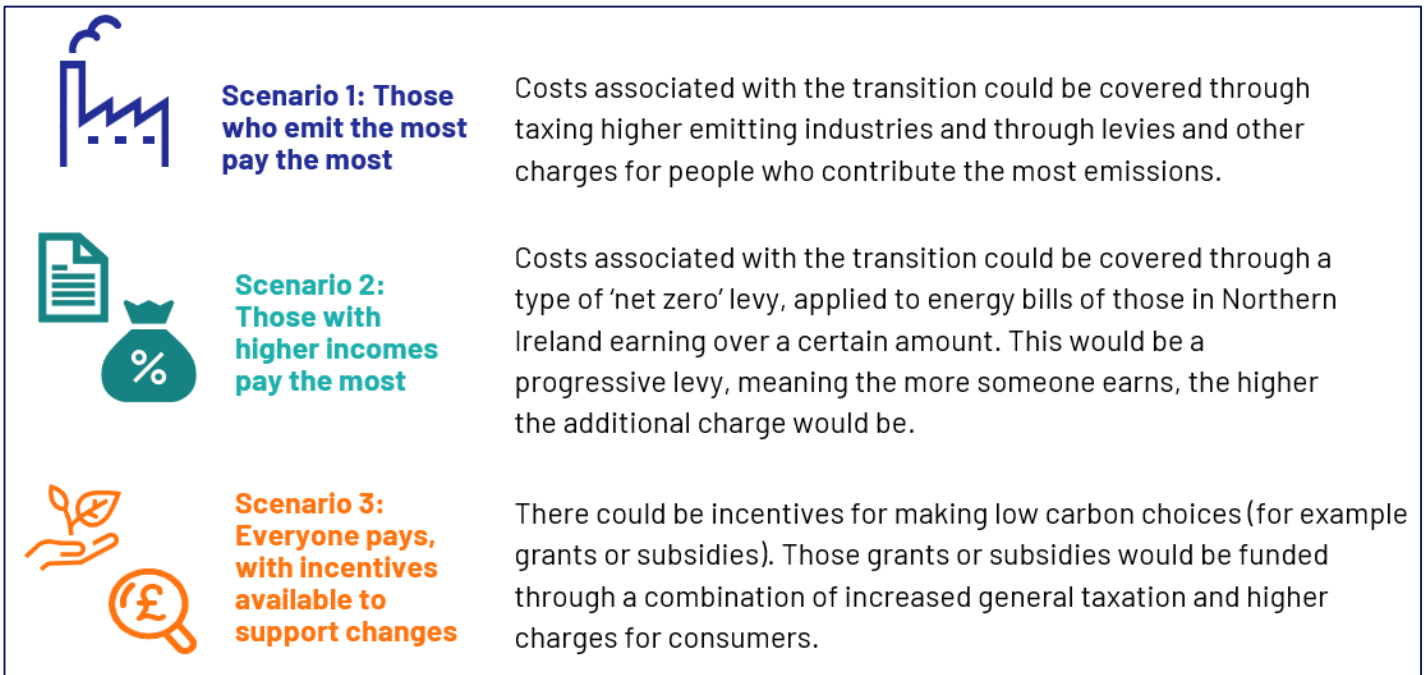
**Ajay and Jenny** (36 and 35) live in a semi-detached house in Garrison, which they own. Jenny has a health condition and uses a dialysis machine, meaning their electricity bill is much higher than it used to be. The house has very low energy efficiency, oil heating and poor insulation. They want to upgrade to gas, but the property is not connected to the gas grid. Their annual income is roughly £64,000.



**Christopher** (29) lives in Ballymena in a three-bedroom house which he owns. He runs a small business from home. The house has an average level of energy efficiency, with gas central heating. But in his home office he uses a plug-in heater in winter and air conditioner in summer. He would like to improve the insulation in the home and install a heat pump but is not sure if they are suitable for his property. Christopher’s annual income is £49,000.

Three fictional future systems of payment to fund the Just Transition to net zero were also developed to help participants consider what a fair distribution of costs might look like (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2: Fictional future payment scenarios**



The research materials and stimulus used can be found in Appendix A.

## 1.4 Interpretation of qualitative data

This report aims to contribute towards UR's work in supporting the Just Transition to net zero in the energy sector whilst meeting their statutory requirements and delivering in line with stakeholder expectations, including those held by consumers.

This report synthesises the diverse views of participants to draw out the consistent and divergent themes of discussions and to draw attention to the way that they – individually and collectively – made sense of a complex topic, describing what mattered to them and why. The report refers to verbatim assertions and quotes made by participants and their understanding of the issues. These statements are not intended as authoritative statements of fact, but they tell us something important about how the issues related to the Just Transition are perceived and understood by members of the public.

A robust and systematic analysis approach was used, with conclusions based on groups that are reflective of the diversity of the wider public. The deliberative nature of the project means that the report follows the flow of the deliberative discussion and reflects the changing views of participants throughout the deliberation. The analysis does not seek to quantify findings or indicate statistical significance from a representative sample.

## 2 Initial views on Northern Ireland's transition to net zero

This chapter summarises participants' starting point in the deliberative process. It outlines their views on climate change at the beginning of the day and their familiarity with key concepts such as net zero and the Just Transition. It then outlines their initial reactions to the information covered in the presentations from subject matter experts.

### Key findings

- The term "climate change" provoked feelings of concern and fear in some participants, but scepticism in others. They associated it with extreme weather impacts, seasonal changes, and environmental damage. There was broad familiarity with the term "net zero", but less so with the concepts of a "Just Transition" or "decarbonisation of energy".
- Having learned more about these topics from subject matter experts, it was felt that significant changes would be required to reach Northern Ireland's net zero target and that reliance on fossil fuels, particularly in the transport sector, could pose a barrier.
- From an early stage, participants expressed concern about the cost implications of reaching net zero, the need for financial support for consumers, and the need for clear information about what changes consumers are expected to make.
- Participants were keen to understand more about how a Just Transition would be achieved in Northern Ireland. They emphasised the importance of financial fairness in terms of who pays for the transition and of ensuring support for more vulnerable groups in society.

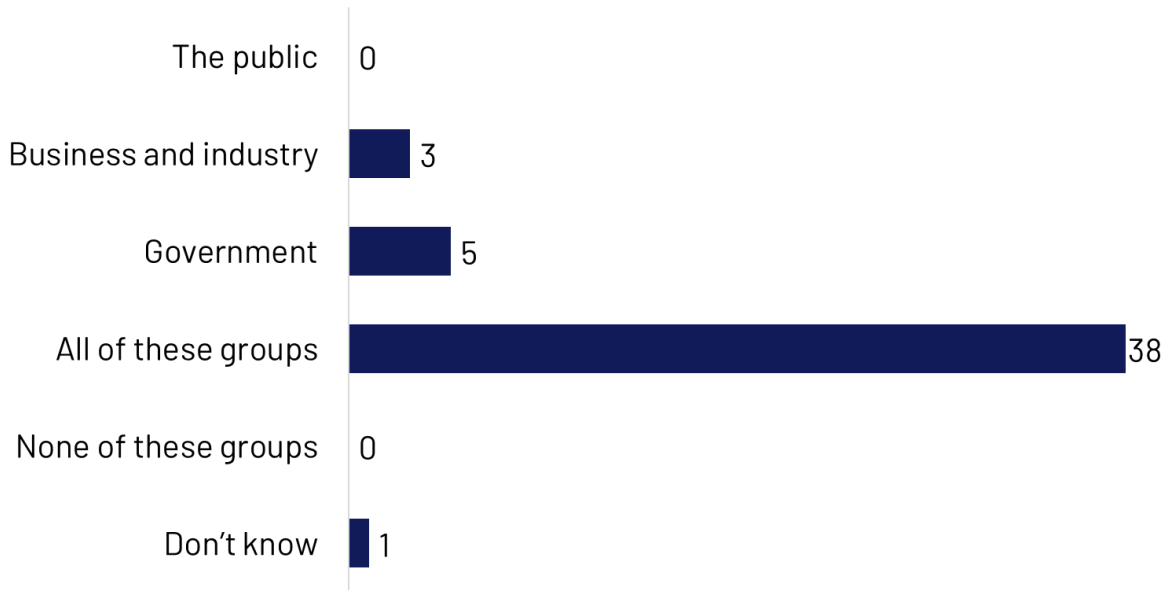
### 2.1 Early views on responsibility

At the start of the workshop, before they received any information from subject matter experts, participants were asked some live polling questions to understand their initial views on responsibility for addressing climate change. They were asked who should be responsible for tackling climate change in Northern Ireland and who should pay for the changes needed to achieve net zero in a just way. The question was asked again at the end of the day (see chapter 5).

Most participants (38 out of the 47 responses) felt that tackling climate change should be a shared responsibility across all groups that were listed – the public, business, industry and government. Smaller numbers felt that government (5) and business and industry (3) should be solely responsible. No participants said that the responsibility lay with the public alone (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Results of polling question 1 at the start of the day**

Who do you think should be responsible to tackling climate change in Northern Ireland?

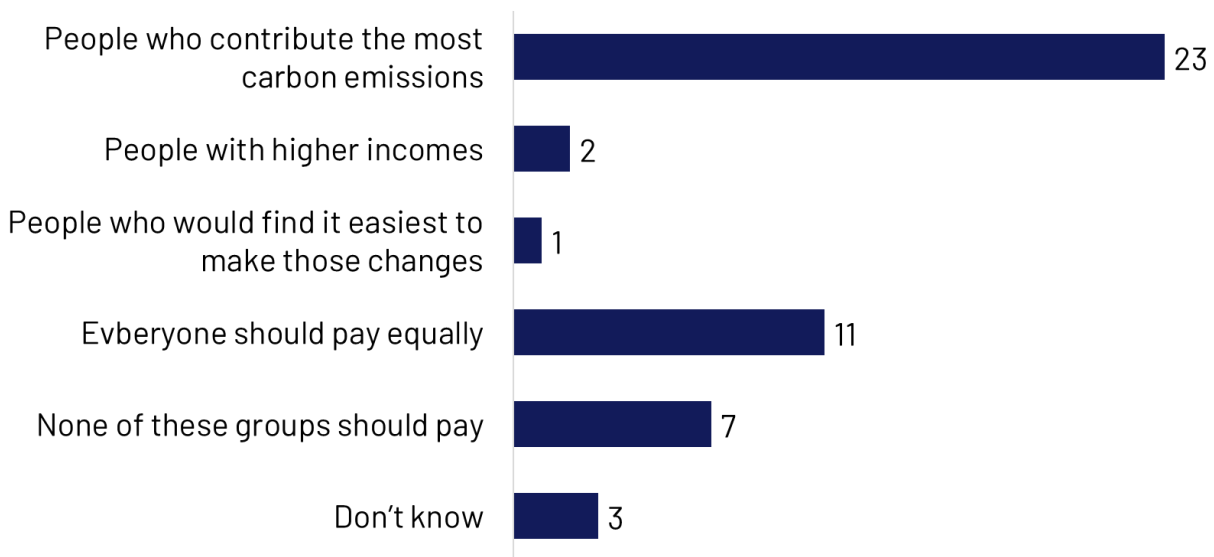


Base: 47 responses

When participants were asked who should pay more for the changes that might be needed to achieve net zero, around half (23 people) felt that those who contribute the most carbon emission should pay. Eleven people felt that everyone should pay equally, while a few less (7 people) felt that none of these groups should pay (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Results of polling question 2 at the start of the day**

Who should pay more for the changes that might be needed (such as replacing oil and gas with cleaner energy sources)?



Base: 47 responses

## 2.2 Associations with climate change

To help understand their unprompted, top-of-mind views, participants were asked to share words or phrases that came to mind when they heard the term “climate change”. Responses highlight a strong association between climate change and weather, with participants sharing phrases like “extreme weather” “changing seasons” “hot” “drought” and “rain”. There were other negative feelings associated with the term, including “desperate” “inequity” and “scary”. There was also a note of scepticism from some participants, sharing words like “hysteria” and “overexaggerated.” Examples of the words and phrases are shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Word associations with the term “climate change”.



## 2.3 Familiarity with key concepts

### 2.3.1 Familiarity with net zero

Participants were generally familiar with the term “net zero”, with most having at least heard the term. There was some uncertainty about the specific level of reduction that was required to reach net zero and how that would be measured, but there was broad understanding that it meant the need for carbon emissions to be reduced, balanced or offset. Some other participants had heard the term, but did not know what it meant.

**“Does it mean completely zero or is it that we get to a certain point and that’s [considered] net zero? It sounds to me like it means zero or nothing. So, no more fossil fuels and causing no harm.” (Participant)**

Participants had heard about net zero through public figures and the media. For example, one participant referenced a documentary by David Attenborough which was focused on the impact of

carbon emissions, emphasising that reaching net zero was a critical point of action to avoid further environmental damage.

Initial views on net zero reflected the range of associations highlighted earlier in relation to climate change. For example, participants often discussed net zero in relation to extreme weather impacts and damage to the natural environment. The impact of net zero on individuals was also mentioned, including the need to change transport habits such as driving electric vehicles. Participants described the changes they were making themselves to help reduce their emissions, such as recycling and generally being mindful of their carbon footprint. However, it was felt that industry and the mega-rich should bear some responsibility for helping to meet net zero targets due to their higher volume of emissions.

**“I think there should be much stricter regulations for these big industries and businesses. [The government] shouldn't expect citizens to change before they change the big industries.”** (Participant)

### 2.3.2 Familiarity with Just Transition

Participants said that, before the session, they were not very familiar with the concept of a Just Transition to net zero and many had never heard the term. When asked to speculate on what it might mean, the “transition” aspect of the term was associated with a change in approach or method, such as changes to consumers’ lifestyles and a shift away from using fossil fuels. It was also interpreted as suggesting a process that will take time and may not be easy for everyone.

**“The word transition means time to me. You know, this isn't going to happen overnight. It's going to be a process that not everybody's going to like.”**  
(Participant)

The term “just” was interpreted as ensuring that the move to net zero is fair, with participants using the phrases “equal transition” and “equitable”, suggesting some broad recognition of the key principles of a Just Transition. On further discussion, participants emphasised the importance of financial fairness in terms of who pays for the transition to net zero and how more vulnerable groups of society can be better supported to participate in the transition.

### 2.3.3 Awareness of and experience of decarbonisation of energy

Participants had mixed awareness of the meaning behind “decarbonisation of energy”. Some had not heard of the term before, while others had heard about it through sources like social media, TV and news outlets. These participants associated decarbonisation of energy primarily with reducing carbon emissions, particularly moving away from fossil fuels like coal and oil and moving to renewable energy sources like electric and wind.

Some participants had already taken steps towards decarbonisation in their own homes including moving from oil to gas heating, upgrading to more efficient boilers (via the Boiler Upgrade Scheme) and installing solar panels. Others had made their homes more energy efficient through measures

such as triple glazing and insulation, which had led to noticeable energy savings and warmer homes in winter.

However, a number of barriers to making those types of changes were raised. Cost was a key barrier, particularly in relation to changes that were viewed as the most expensive such as heat pumps. Associated with this view was a perception that grants or financial support towards these costs would be difficult to access. Some participants had considered installing a heat pump, but had not gone ahead because they were told their home was not suitable. There was also some criticism of solar panels, due to a perception that they can impact on the value of your home and your level of home insurance.

**“They say ‘we’ll give you grants for solar panels’ but the grants won’t cover the [costs] of the ten year life cycle of a solar panel...And they say it is hard to sell a house now if you’ve got these solar panels, and insurance won’t cover them.”**

(Participant)

## 2.4 Reactions to the presentations

Early in the workshop two presentations were shared by experts to help inform participants’ later discussions. The first focused on climate change, net zero and the Just Transition, while the second focused on Northern Ireland’s energy sector and the changes likely to be needed to transition to net zero. Initial reflections on the presentations are outlined below.

### 2.4.1 Northern Ireland’s net zero target

There were mixed views on Northern Ireland’s target of reaching net zero by 2050. On the one hand, participants welcomed the progress Northern Ireland had already made in renewable energy, citing the increase in wind energy usage from 4% to 40% since the 1990s as a step in the right direction. It was also felt that because net zero is about the balance of emissions and removals, rather than a complete elimination of carbon emissions, the prospect of reaching this goal by 2050 seemed more feasible. It was felt that the goal could be achieved if dramatic changes were made and collective action was taken, including commitments from both government and businesses.

On the other hand, there was also scepticism about Northern Ireland’s ability to reach net zero by 2050 due to the length of time it has taken to introduce and scale renewable energy and decrease carbon emissions. For instance, one participant highlighted that it has taken 20 years for Northern Ireland to go from 4% to 40% wind energy usage and suggested that getting beyond 80% would take at least another 20 years. This highlighted that there were concerns about the pace of change and that things were not moving fast enough to achieve net zero within the time frame.

Northern Ireland’s ongoing reliance on fossil fuels was also perceived as a barrier to achieving net zero by 2050. Participants felt that the transport sector was particularly reliant on fossil fuels and that more time would be needed for the sector to switch to entirely renewable energy sources.

**"How realistic is that going to be, getting away from coal and gas for the likes of some [types of] transport...I don't personally see diesel or petrol ever going away any time soon."** (Participant)

Some participants suggested that the net zero target should be pushed back to 2060 or 2070 to make it more achievable. However, there was concern that this could mean that the target could be continuously pushed back, particularly due to external factors like changing governments and other unforeseen economic or political changes.

#### 2.4.2 Early concerns about the transition to net zero

Having heard about the types of changes needed to reach net zero, participants voiced concerns about the financial burden this could have on consumers. Participants felt alarmed about the high costs associated with making changes to people's homes, such as investing in a heat pump. The presenters had explained that the cost of a heat pump could range from around £2,500 to £14,000 depending on the property and the scale of the work required. Those who had already changed their energy source from oil to gas also expressed concerns about the costs of potentially having to change again to a renewable energy source.

It was felt that the costs associated with changes to home energy systems could be particularly challenging for those with low incomes or who were more financially vulnerable, especially against a background of rising costs of living. The presentations had highlighted some of the financial support available to consumers, such as the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme. Nonetheless, there was a perception that there was not enough financial support, such as grants, for consumers to shift their household to a renewable energy source.

**"I didn't use my fireplace over the winter because I was conserving energy. I just thought we'll use the oil and not do both because I was running [it] all the time."** (Participant)

There was a desire for greater transparency about what the changes required might mean for consumers' households and how it would impact them. Participants wanted to know what the costs, benefits and available options to contribute towards net zero were, and whether changes would be mandatory or optional. Participants felt that the need for government support was even stronger if changes were mandatory, as many consumers may otherwise be placed under further financial strain. This was aligned with the view among some participants that the changes required for the transition to net zero were being set, or even "forced", by government rather than being a choice made by the consumer.

Participants also questioned what the incentive was for consumers to invest in a renewable energy source. There was a need for more information about the specific benefits for consumers, for example whether or not changing heating systems would help reduce household bills in the long term. Participants also wanted more detail about what financial incentives would be available to

consumers, how much they would be, what these incentives would look like in practice, and who would be eligible for them.

Participants also emphasised the importance of non-price-based protections for vulnerable consumers. They highlighted the importance of keeping these consumers updated with relevant information about what actions they were expected to take and what sources of support were available to them. They felt this information should be accessible and from an independent body.

Despite these reservations, there was also a sense of cautious optimism about the impact of the changes needed to achieve net zero. It was felt that investing in energy efficiency measures and cleaner heating systems could help to reduce household energy bills. There was a view that investing in these measures today could help to support current and future generations. However, it was also felt that older generations may not live to see the long term benefits from the transition which may pose a barrier to encouraging them to invest in making changes.

### 2.4.3 Early views on achieving a Just Transition

Having learned about the concept of a Just Transition, participants were keen to understand more about how it might be achieved. Their initial reflections focused on the cost implications for consumers and the importance of financial support being provided for the most vulnerable in society to manage the costs of achieving net zero. They believed it was important to ensure that no one was left behind by providing grants and subsidies to help those unable to manage the costs. Some participants questioned whether the transition could ever be truly just, as there will always be some people who can afford changes more than others.

**"I don't think it'll ever be fair because people's incomes are all different... it's going to hurt some people more than others."** (Participant)

There was general agreement that the responsibility for paying for the transition should not fall solely on the consumers. Participants felt that it would be unfair for consumers to bear the costs, when the cost of living is currently so high, particularly for low earners. They therefore felt that government and industry both had a significant role to play in helping pay for the transition.

Participants also felt that consumers should be given transparent and clear information about the changes needed to achieve net zero. They thought this would include accessible information about policy changes, costs associated with the transition and benefits to consumers.

The importance of the Just Transition was also linked with the need to upskill people as part of the transition to a more sustainable energy system. One participant particularly emphasised a need for a skilled workforce implementing these technologies, and they saw this as a positive opportunity to invest more in the sector and in people to achieve a successful and fair energy transition.

## 2.4.4 Summary of early views on fairness

To help summarise their early views, participants were asked how they would answer the following question: “To make the transition to net zero as just as possible we should....”. From these responses, a number of themes emerged:

- **Cost and affordability** were significant concerns among the participants, as outlined above. They highlighted the necessity for fair, realistic, and affordable pricing structures for consumers, suggesting that energy companies share the burden by offering subsidies or reducing their profit margins.
- Reflecting those financial concerns, there was a call for **substantial incentives, grants, and financial support** from the government to make the transition financially viable for individuals.
- Participants stressed the importance of having access to **clear, transparent, and unbiased information**, advocating for reliable sources such as independent government bodies or regulated agencies to provide this.
- **Education and awareness-raising** were seen as critical. The necessity of educating the public was emphasised, alongside conducting thorough research and ensuring people are properly informed of their options.
- **Collective responsibility** for the cost of the transition, ensuring that consumers do not bear all of the costs. Reflecting their views at the start of the session (see Figure 2.1 and 2.2), there was a sense that responsibility for costs should be shared between government, industry and the public.

## 3 Consumer concerns about the transition to net zero

This chapter outlines the aspects of the transition to net zero that participants were most concerned about and what was driving those concerns. Concerns were grouped around three broad areas: costs, practicalities, and information.

### Key findings

- Cost was a key concern for participants. This included both the upfront costs of installing new energy systems such as heat pumps, and the long-term running costs of these newer technologies.
- There was concern that consumers would be asked to continually change their heating system as technologies developed or government expectations changed. This was particularly of concern to participants who had only recently changed to gas central heating, and now felt they were being asked to change systems again.
- There were practical concerns about the level of disruption to properties involved with changing heating systems, particularly for older and less energy-efficient homes. There was also some scepticism about the reliability of heat pumps and uncertainty about their effectiveness as a home heating source.
- Participants generally felt concerned about a lack of information about what actions they were being expected to take and what the costs of those actions were.

### 3.1 Concerns about costs

The most pressing concern for participants was the financial burden associated with adopting new energy technologies such as heat pumps and solar panels. The upfront cost of these newer technologies was perceived to be substantial, making it difficult for many households to consider these upgrades amid a rising cost of living. Concerns about cost were often framed in terms of the question of “who should pay” and participants wanted reassurance that costs would not solely be the responsibility of consumers. As noted earlier, it was felt that those with low incomes or who were more financially vulnerable would find the costs particularly challenging unless financial support was provided.

**“It would be a big concern, the cost. I haven’t [got] a full-time proper job...it would be a big struggle on top of paying for everything else.”** (Participant)

There was additional concern surrounding the long-term costs associated with heat pumps and other newer energy systems. It was felt that the running costs of these technologies were

unpredictable and there was a perception that consumers would end up paying higher energy bills than they would with oil or gas heating.

**“I just Googled it. The higher cost of electricity compared to gas can make [heat pumps] more expensive to run in some cases.”** (Participant)

Participants were also concerned about making sizable investments in technologies that might become obsolete or require further adjustment in a short timeframe. Some participants described having already invested to change from oil to gas heating in their homes and were concerned about having to invest again to move from gas heating to a cleaner energy source.

**“We went from oil heating, then we went to pellets and now we're on the gas. And now we [need to get] the heat pump? That's four sources of heating.”**  
(Participant)

While these concerns continued throughout the discussions, participants did also recognise the potential benefits of the transition to net zero in the energy sector, including positive impacts on the environment. It was also felt that by shifting to locally sourced renewable energy, households could reduce their dependency on fossil fuels and protect themselves from fluctuations in global energy markets. They also suggested that there may be long-term financial savings from a move towards renewable energy sources and more energy efficient forms of heating, as homes may use less energy overall.

### 3.2 Concerns about practicalities and reliability of technology

Participants raised some practical concerns, including the suitability of older homes for modifications. Some had been told that their properties would not be suitable for a heat pump and were unsure about what impact this would have on them, particularly if there was an expectation from government for consumers to make this change. Others were concerned that the age and condition of their property would mean that the scale of work required to support a change in heating system would cause significant disruption and would be prohibitively expensive.

There was also scepticism around the technology itself, especially in relation to heat pumps. Some participants had heard negative reports about the level of warmth that can be generated from a heat pump. They were therefore concerned about investing in technologies that might not deliver the expected comfort in their homes or that would require them to use more heating than they currently do. The perception that heat pumps may not be applicable to every type of household also cast doubt over the effectiveness of the technology.

**"I've heard so many bad reports about the heat pumps and that they don't work...So that would put me off and make me worry...because I'm a really cold person and I love my heat."** (Participant)

Another practical concern was that it would be difficult to find reliable and skilled tradespeople to install heat pumps. This was based on the perception that there was a lack of engineers in Northern Ireland to both install or to service these technologies.

### 3.3 Concerns about lack of information

Participants felt that they lacked the necessary information to make informed decisions about adopting renewable technologies. This included uncertainty about the costs, benefits, and available options, which they felt was holding them back from making changes to in their homes.

**"The government is saying we must get to net zero and all, but they're not telling us what progress has been made. They're not giving any of that information out. There really is a huge lack [of information] from the top down."** (Participant)

The lack of clear communication about government expectations of consumers therefore left participants unsure about their obligations and best practices

## 4 Consumer priorities for a Just Transition to net zero

This chapter outlines participants' views on how the transition to net zero could be made as fair, or just, as possible and what their priorities for achieving a Just Transition in Northern Ireland were. This chapter outlines participants' views on how the transition to net zero could be made as fair as possible and what their priorities for achieving a Just Transition in Northern Ireland were.

### Key findings

- Financial support towards the cost of the transition was seen as a key priority for achieving a Just Transition. In particular, support for lower-income households or those unable to afford the costs of the transition, people with certain disabilities or health conditions, and private renters was seen as important.
- Access to clear, simple, and accessible information was considered crucial for a Just Transition, as this would help consumers to make informed decisions about changes, options, and costs. It was suggested that there could be a "one-stop shop" to provide independent advice for consumers about their responsibilities, the options available to them, and the costs.
- It was felt that an independent body should oversee the transition in the energy sector, ensuring that both public sector and private companies act in the public's best interest, with increased transparency in decision-making.

### 4.1 Cost and financial support

Participants emphasised the importance of financial support to alleviate the cost burden associated with transitioning to net zero. The idea of government subsidies was frequently discussed, with participants advocating for programmes that would help offset the high upfront costs of installing renewable energy technologies like heat pumps and solar panels.

There was a strong call for interest-free loans and a tiered grant system based on household income levels or ability to afford the changes necessary. Participants also suggested payment plans where individuals could contribute to a fund over time to cover future energy efficiency upgrades, thereby smoothing the financial hurdle over a manageable period. There was a perception that consumers were being "forced" to make these changes that they otherwise would not have chosen to do. If this perceived forced change to cleaner energy comes at a cost to consumers, participants believed that government support would be required to help stimulate this transition.

**“We're not going out searching for something and choosing to buy it. We're being forced to make that choice. So I think there should be grants available and I definitely think that there should be interest free loans available.”** (Participant)

The discussions highlighted a desire for a means-tested approach to financial support. It was felt that this would help ensure that assistance is prioritised for those who require it most and prevent resources from being disproportionately allocated to households that might not need financial help as urgently. Participants argued that this approach could lead to a more equitable distribution of support and protect the most vulnerable or economically disadvantaged. It was also argued that means-testing should not focus on household income alone, but should also take into account other circumstances like health condition or other needs within the household.

**“Means test different areas of their life, not just the money they earn. It [could include] health condition and whatever else comes into it...You can't just make a decision on how much money people have.”** (Participant)

## 4.2 Access to independent information

Participants felt that a crucial aspect of ensuring a Just Transition is the provision of clear, simple, and accessible information to consumers. They emphasised that consumers should be fully informed about the changes they would be expected or required to make, the options available to them, and the associated costs. Clarity in guidelines about pricing structures and transparency in financial implications for consumers were deemed essential to building trust and confidence. It was felt that by having a clear understanding of what the transition involves, consumers can make informed decisions about adopting new technologies and energy-efficient practices.

**“There has to be clear and precise information available...Because when people can factor these things in [in advance], then it becomes more doable.”** (Participant)

One suggestion was establishing a “one-stop shop” or an independent body dedicated to providing impartial advice and support for consumers. This entity would serve as a reliable source of information, free from commercial interests, ensuring that consumers receive unbiased details about their choices. Such a resource would aim to demystify the complexities of transitioning to clean or renewable energy, offering advice on the most suitable options based on individual household needs and circumstances.

**“Imagine if you had the advice. You don't need to go anywhere else, literally it's a one stop shop – job done.”** (Participant)

Participants also highlighted the role of the government in proactively disseminating information, rather than relying on consumers to seek it out. They suggested that this should include regular communication and updates about the transition process, delivered through accessible channels that reach a broad audience. By taking responsibility for ensuring consumers are well-informed, it was felt that the government can help prevent misinformation and confusion.

### 4.3 Effective governance and accountability

Participants emphasised the need for an independent body to have oversight over the transition to net zero in the energy sector, ensuring that both governmental and private companies are acting in the public's best interest. They felt that an independent body could offer a platform for concerns to be addressed, help prevent unfair practices, and guarantee that consumer rights are protected. It should be noted that participants did not explicitly state that the Utility Regulator should perform this function, but rather talked about the role of an independent body in more general and hypothetical terms.

There was also a call for increased transparency in the decisions taken by government and by the energy sector. Participants advocated for open communication about where public funds are allocated towards the net zero transition and how those decisions are made, to help build trust among consumers. By making these processes transparent, it was felt that the government can promote a culture of accountability and demonstrate its commitment to a fair transition.

### 4.4 Groups needing most support for a Just Transition

To aid their discussions around priorities for a Just Transition, participants were shown fictional characters representing different types of home, heating system, income levels and other circumstances. This helped to identify the types of people that participants felt would need the most, and the least, support in the transition to net zero.

#### Lower income households

Participants strongly felt that lower income households should be prioritised for financial assistance. It was felt that these households would struggle to afford the costs associated with making their home more energy efficient or moving to cleaner heating systems. It was therefore felt that grants and subsidies should be available for people such as Lee and Mary and David (see below). This also prompted suggestions such as a progressive levy where higher earners contribute more. Although there were debates regarding the financial status of pensioners, participants generally agreed that those with limited incomes should be shielded from the costs associated with transitioning.



**Lee**, who has an annual income of £22,000. Lee's home is poorly insulated, and she already struggles to afford to use portable electric heaters to stay warm.

Participants therefore felt she would need financial support with any changes required or any increases in her costs.



**Mary and David**, who have a combined income (from pensions and benefits) of roughly £40,000 per year. As the couple already cannot afford to use any more central heating, it was felt that they would require financial support with any costs associated with the transition.

**“She’s [Lee] very limited as to what she can make because it’s not her place...the landlord would benefit...Pretty difficult situation...and she’s not on a massive income.”** (Participant)

It was generally felt that higher income households would have an easier time transitioning to net zero because they could afford the upfront costs of new technologies and absorb any increases in energy costs. Among the fictional characters, participants felt that James and Emma would be able to make the transition easier due to their high income.



**James and Emma** (42 and 40) live in a detached home which they own. They have already made changes to the property to make it more energy efficient. Due to their combined income of £115,000, participants believed they would be able to afford any further adjustments to their property without having to get additional support.

**“They [James and Emma] seem financially stable. I don’t think they’d need much [help with the transition]. They’re at a really nice place, where they own it. They’re already energy efficient and they’re just looking for some home improvements.”** (Participant)

### People with disabilities or health conditions

People in vulnerable circumstances, including those with some disabilities and health conditions requiring a certain level of warmth or energy-intensive medical equipment, were frequently mentioned as needing additional support. It was felt that some conditions could make individuals more reliant on heating or electricity and that they should automatically qualify for grants or other assistance. This was the case with the characters of Ajay and Jenny, as Jenny required the use of a dialysis machine.



**Ajay and Jenny** (36 and 35) have a combined income of £64,000 and live in a semi-detached house which they own. As the couple need to use greater amounts of energy due to Jenny’s health condition, it was felt that they should receive some support towards any changes they might need to make to their home energy.

### Renters

It was felt that renters, particularly those on low incomes and without influence over necessary upgrades, should be considered for support as they would struggle to cope with the cost of the transition. The character of Lee was an example of someone participants felt should receive help towards the costs.

Views differed somewhat in relation to social and private renters. It was noted that those in social housing would be likely to have the cost of any energy efficiency measures or heating upgrades in the property covered by the Housing Executive. Social tenants were therefore seen as already being supported with the transition to an extent. For private renters, these changes would be more at the discretion of the landlord. Participants therefore felt that there was a risk that private

tenants may be left behind if landlords chose not to make any changes to their properties. Even when the landlord does pay for upgrades, there was concern that those costs could be pushed onto the tenant through increased rent.

To make the system fair, it was suggested that measures could be put in place to ensure that the cost of any renovations or upgrades were not passed on to the tenant through higher rents. This could be through regulation or other restrictions places on landlords.

## Business owners

Participants debated the extent to which support should be available for small businesses. When reflecting on the character Christopher, some felt that incentives and supports should be available to him as they recognised the wider benefits of encouraging businesses to become more energy efficient. It was also suggested that Christopher may ultimately be contributing fewer emissions by running his business from home and not travelling to an office every day.

**“Is there different laws and incentives for, you know, promoting workplaces, offices, buildings to become more carbon neutral and more energy efficient? So would he be able to get some sort of incentive for installing [a heat pump]?”** (Participant)

However, they also highlighted his increased energy usage and higher emissions as a result of running the business from his home and felt that Christopher should therefore bear responsibility for the costs associated with his energy transition. Christopher’s income was also seen as large enough to be able to afford some improvements to the energy efficiency of his home.



**Christopher** (29) has an income of £49,000 and runs a small business from his home. Because he had high levels of energy use as a result of his business, and because of this income, it was felt that he bore some responsibility for making his home more energy efficient. However, there was also a view that Christopher should receive some financial support as a way of helping support small businesses and incentivise them to be more energy efficient.

Similar to the views on communications with consumers, it suggested that information should be provided to small businesses on steps they could take to reduce energy consumption and make their workplace more energy efficient.

# 5 Who should pay for the transition to net zero?

This section outlined participants' views on who should pay for the transition to net zero. It includes views on three hypothetical systems of payment, designed to help understand what the fairest approach to funding the transition should be. These were based on broad principles and were not designed to be reflective of specific UK Government policy or of the Northern Ireland Executive's position on systems of payment.

## Key findings

- Participants believed that government, industry, and the public should share the financial burden of the transition to net zero, with the government taking the lead. They strongly emphasised the need to protect vulnerable groups through targeted financial support.
- A system of payment based on level of emissions was met with mixed views. While there was a support for higher-emitting industries bearing the responsibility for costs, there was concern that these businesses may end up passing those costs on to consumers. This scenario was also seen as penalising people who live in older, less energy-efficient homes while benefiting individuals with newer homes and more financial resources.
- A "net zero" levy on higher earners was also met with mixed reactions, with concerns that it may unjustly penalise higher earners who had already invested in energy efficiency improvements or taken other steps to reduce their carbon emissions.
- A scenario based on incentives, funded through taxation and consumer charges, was largely rejected by participants. This was criticised due to concerns about consumers paying twice – once through taxation and once through charges. The requirement for everyone to contribute in this way, regardless of individual needs or willingness, was seen as unfair as it would not adequately account for individuals' circumstances or previous efforts to reduce emissions.
- Across each the potential pricing scenarios, there was a strong sense that individual circumstances needed to be borne in mind.

## 5.1 Overarching views on who should pay for the transition

Participants felt that government, industry and the public all had some responsibility for paying for the transition to net zero.

It was strongly felt that the government (either the UK Government or the Northern Ireland Executive, depending on areas of responsibility) should take the lead by funding a significant share of the costs of the transition. This perspective was rooted in the idea that, since the government sets net zero targets and is responsible for meeting them, it should shoulder the obligation to

financially support the transition. It was suggested that this could be in the form of grants and subsidies for consumers to help support the costs of the transition. Some participants acknowledged, however, that government funds are derived from taxpayers and were concerned that consumers may ultimately fund any government support initiatives through increased taxes.

**“Well, they [the Government] have the target to meet [net zero by 2050]...So they should come help.” (Participant)**

Participants also felt that energy companies, particularly those with substantial profits, should significantly contribute to the transition costs. Many viewed these companies as having a moral obligation to invest in the transition, considering their prominent role within the current energy system and their financial capacity.

While recognising that consumers would inevitably bear some costs, participants opposed the idea of placing the financial burden primarily on them. As outlined previously in this report, there was concern about maintaining energy affordability and preventing households from being disproportionately impacted by rising costs. Participants once again strongly emphasised the need to protect vulnerable groups, particularly low-income households and those in less energy-efficient homes, through targeted financial support. Ensuring affordability and preventing disproportionate burdens on these groups were seen as fundamental aspects of a Just Transition.

## 5.2 Scenario 1: Those who emit the most pay the most

**Under this scenario, costs associated with the transition could be covered through taxing higher emitting industries and through levies and other charges for people who contribute the most emissions.**



Participants had mixed views on the fairness of this system of payment. While initially they argued that targeting those responsible for emitting was fair in principle, further deliberations highlighted several concerns about its implementation and impact on businesses and consumers.

### 5.2.1 Positive aspects of this scenario

The scenario was appealing due to its alignment with the "polluter pays" principle, which holds that those most responsible for emissions should be accountable for the associated costs. This principle was seen as fair when applied to higher-emitting industries, suggesting that these entities should bear a larger share of the financial burden for the transition to net zero. However, it was suggested that some businesses providing essential services that require high rates of carbon emissions should be exempt from this system of payment, particularly the agricultural sector due to its essential function of providing food for people in Northern Ireland.

Participants also felt that businesses could easily transfer the financial burden of higher emissions taxation onto consumers, making the system ineffective. The taxing of industries was therefore considered fair if they incentivised reductions in emissions, but only if the costs were not subsequently passed down to consumers.

## 5.2.2 Negative aspects of this scenario

As noted above, participants worried that companies would pass on the costs of higher taxes to consumers, leading some to feel that they would lose out whatever the approach.

**“We're still going to lose either way because they'll [companies] get us one way or another.”** (Participant)

Many participants feared that this scenario would disproportionately affect those with lower incomes. Concerns were raised over the financial burden that could result from higher levies and the difficulty in affording necessary upgrades to reduce emissions. It was felt that these individuals would already have limited resources to invest in necessary upgrades, resulting in disproportionate costs based on their higher emissions. This was a point of concern for many participants who feared such a system might penalise those least able to afford upgrades.

This scenario was also seen as penalising people who live in older, less energy-efficient homes while benefiting individuals with newer homes and more financial resources. There was a perception these households could be financially “hammered both ways” due to higher levies and the costs of necessary home upgrades to make their homes more energy efficient. Returning to the fictional characters, it was felt that it would be unfair for a tenant like Lee to be penalised for having an energy inefficient home which was not within her control and not something she could afford change.

Ethical concerns were also raised about the fairness of penalising individuals for emissions driven by factors beyond their control. Some participants referred to the character of Jenny (see section 4.4), who had a health condition that required her use a dialysis machine multiple times a week. This was considered a level of energy use that was not within Jenny’s control, and that she should not be penalised for. Others showed concern that people living in poorly insulated homes, particularly those that may not be suitable for certain types of insulation, may be unfairly expected to pay more than those living a new property with good insulation. Participants therefore emphasised the need for consideration or protective measures for vulnerable groups, such as those relying on medical equipment or living in inadequately insulated homes, to ensure the system does not unfairly penalise those with higher energy needs as a result of these circumstances.

Reflecting on this scenario, participants worried about the pressure to meet emission targets and the prospect of paying higher levies. This feeling was especially pronounced for those already experiencing financial strains, highlighting the potential emotional and psychological impacts of such a system.

## 5.2.3 What would make this system fairer

Overall, participants felt that this payment system would be fairer if it more directly took individual consumers’ circumstances into account. This could be through a means-tested support to ensure

that financial assistance reaches those most in need, such as low-income households, pensioners, and individuals with health conditions.

Participants expressed concerns over potential costs being passed through to consumers and discussed the need for regulatory measures to be in place to manage this in a fair way. Additionally, participants recommended exemptions or allowances for essential industries and individuals with necessary high emissions, coupled with interventions like price caps to stabilise costs.

### 5.3 Scenario 2: Those on higher incomes pay the most

**Under this system, costs associated with the transition could be covered through a type of 'net zero' levy, applied to energy bills of those in Northern Ireland earning over a certain amount. This would be a progressive levy, meaning the more someone earns, the higher the additional charge would be.**



This scenario was met with mixed views. While there was appreciation of the system's alignment with the principle of ability to pay, concern was raised about its fairness for middle and high income earners.

#### 5.3.1 Positive aspects of this scenario

An appealing aspect of this scenario was that it was based on the principle that those with the financial means should contribute more. Participants had previously stressed the importance of income and affordability being taken into consideration as part of a Just Transition and felt that this scenario met this requirement to an extent. It was suggested that such a system could motivate higher earners to adopt energy efficient measures because of the higher levies they were paying.

By exempting lower-income individuals from additional levies it was felt that the system would alleviate significant financial burdens, allowing these households to access energy-efficient technologies they might otherwise be unable to afford.

#### 5.3.2 Negative aspects of this scenario

Participants argued that this system would unfairly penalise higher earners regardless of their actual emissions, potentially ignoring their efforts to reduce their carbon footprint.

**“But because of my earnings, I'm going to get again penalised...I've already invest [in energy efficient technology] but I'm going to [be penalised]. Because of my salary. With scenario two, I'm going to get penalised because of that.”**

(Participant)

They also worried about the potential for loopholes and complexities that might allow some high earners to escape their fair share of payments, while disproportionately burdening middle-income

families. Renters were particularly worried about the possibility of landlords passing on these costs through increased rents.

The lack of clarity regarding implementation, the basis for defining "higher income," and how the levy would be assessed and collected further contributed to perceptions of unfairness.

### 5.3.3 What would make this system more fair

Participants wanted more assurance that this type of system would protect those that could not afford to make payments and safeguard vulnerable individuals that required additional support. They felt that a system based on income alone did not fully capture this. They also suggested that basing the system on disposable income, rather than gross income, could be a fairer assessment of an individual's capacity to pay.

To prevent excessive burdens on any one group, the suggestion of capping contributions or levelling taxes at lower percentages for higher earners was proposed. There was a call for some level of exemptions or incentives for individuals who had proactively invested in energy saving technologies to avoid penalising those already contributing to emissions reduction efforts.

## 5.4 Scenario 3: Everyone pays, with incentives available to support changes

**Under this scenario, there could be incentives for making low carbon choices (for example grants or subsidies). These would be funded through a combination of increased general taxation and higher charges for consumers.**



Overall, this scenario was met with significant criticism and participants were much more negative than positive.

### 5.4.1 Positive aspects of this scenario

Some participants saw potential fairness in the idea that everyone contributes to the cost of the transition, suggesting that this approach fosters collective responsibility and shared action towards a common environmental goal. The availability of grants and subsidies was also considered a positive aspect, as these could help offset the costs and make the transition more accessible to lower-income households.

**"If the incentive was significant and worth more than what I was being taxed or charged for then [it would be appealing]." (Participant)**

### 5.4.2 Negative aspects of this scenario

Participants were concerned about the prospect of potentially paying twice through the combination of increased general taxation and higher consumer charges. The requirement for everyone to contribute in this way, regardless of individual needs or willingness, was seen as unfair. It was felt that this approach would not adequately account for individuals' circumstances or previous efforts to reduce emissions. There was concern about the system's impact on lower-

income households and that it could place a heavier financial burden on those with the least ability to pay, exacerbating existing economic inequalities.

**“I just don’t think its fair that everybody’s paying for it. Nobody want to change, nobody wants to do this, but [in this scenario] we’re paying for it.”** (Participant)

There was concern that tenants might end up funding improvements to properties they do not own, without reaping the long-term benefits. Participants that were currently renting their properties worried about facing increased rent as landlords might pass on the costs of energy efficiency upgrades, describing getting caught in a ‘vortex’ of costs.

There was also scepticism about whether the incentives provided would be sufficient to offset the expenses of significant upgrades, such as installing heat pumps. Concerns were raised about the complexity and potential bureaucracy involved in accessing these grants. Distrust in the government’s ability to manage the system effectively and concerns over the potential permanence of increased taxes further fuelled negative sentiments.

### 5.4.3 What would make this system more fair

To help make this system fair, participants suggested clear and transparent information about how costs are calculated. Participants also felt it was important to provide accessible information to make consumers aware of what incentives were available to them and how to access them.

Participants sought assurance that renters would be able to benefit from the grants and subsidies described and that landlords would be prevented passing on costs unjustly to tenants. This emphasised the need for adequate governance to prevent abuse of the incentives system.

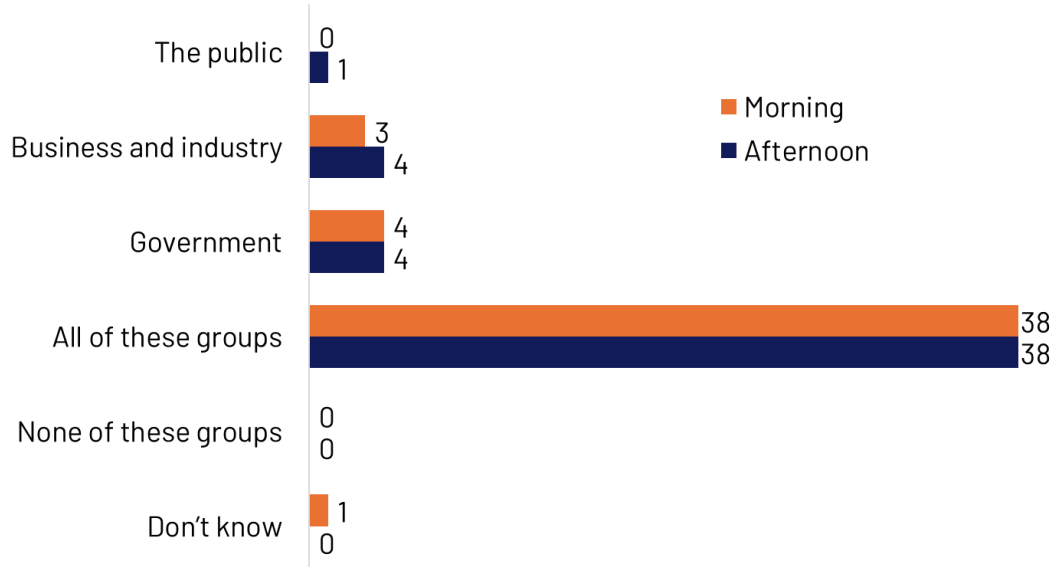
## 5.5 Final views on responsibility

At the end of the workshop, participants were again asked live polling questions to understand their final views on responsibility for addressing climate change. They were asked the same questions as they were at the beginning of the day (see chapter 2).

In the afternoon, most participants (38 out of the 47 responses) felt that tackling climate change should be a shared responsibility across all groups that were listed. This was consistent with the morning’s responses, highlighting that the sense of collective responsibility for the transition remained strong throughout the day. (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1: Results of polling question 1 at the end of the day**

Who do you think should be responsible to tackling climate change in Northern Ireland?

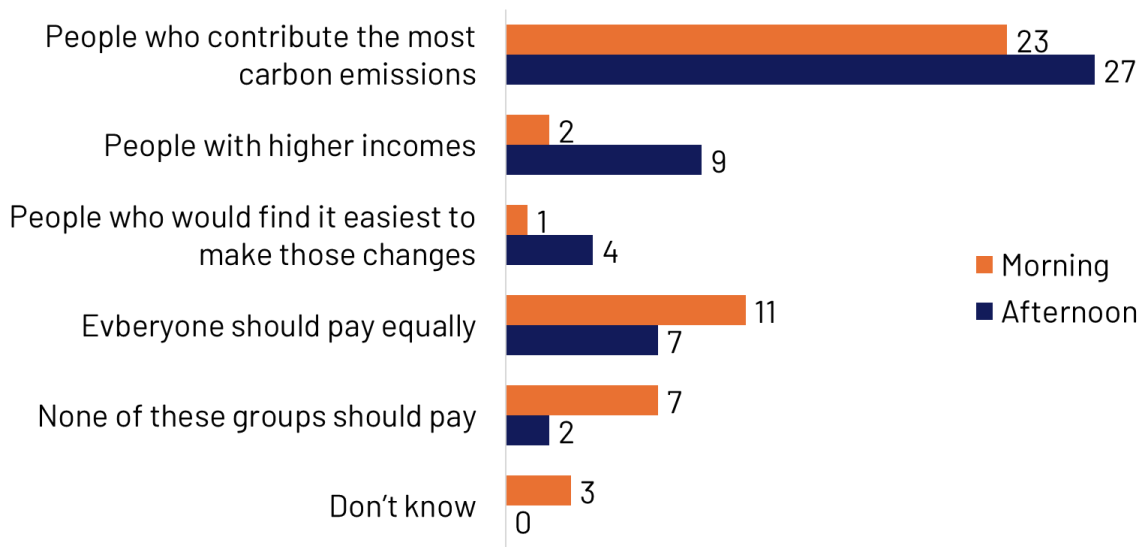


Base: 47 responses

When participants were asked who should pay more for the changes that might be needed to achieve net zero, there was a slight shift since the morning, suggesting a stronger position on where responsibility for payment lies. More people now said that this responsibility lay with those who contribute the most carbon emission, those with higher incomes, and those who would find it easier to make the changes. This was coupled with a decrease in those saying everyone should pay equally and none of these groups should pay. (Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Results of polling question 2 at the end of the day**

Who should pay more for the changes that might be needed (such as replacing oil and gas with cleaner energy sources)?



Base: 47 responses

### 5.6 How views changed

One of the benefits of a deliberative engagement approach is the opportunity for participants to gradually learn about and consider a topic, to consider different perspectives, and to reach conclusions that may differ from their starting position.

Some perspectives remained largely the same throughout this process. There was a fairly consistent view among participants that the responsibility for the transition to net zero should be shared and should not only fall on consumers. A strong theme throughout the day was that a Just Transition should be linked to financial fairness, with sufficient levels of support and protection for consumers to avoid people being placed under further financial burden, particularly the most vulnerable in society. Throughout the day participants also highlighted the need for information and awareness-raising about the changes needed and the impacts they would have on consumers.

There were also some areas in which views had changed over the course of the day. Participants felt more informed about the issues in general, as a result of the information in the presentations and from their discussions with each other. They said they understood more about climate change in general, the topic of net zero, and the changes that would be required by consumers to help support that transition.

**“Listening to [the presenters] and to everybody else’s views here today has changed my opinion. I knew what net zero was, but I didn’t really understand it. So this session was really informative for me. I now understand it, and I get that we have to go that way.”** (Participant).

Some felt more optimistic about the ability of reaching the net zero target. Having started the day feeling that this was an impossible task, these participants left feeling encouraged that progress would be possible if there was collective action. However, there was also a sense of increased frustration by the end of the day. Some said they appreciated the need for action to be taken, but did not feel reassured that there was a clear plan in place to get there, particularly citing a lack of clear actions from large businesses, industry and government. Some also said they felt more concerned about climate change in general, as the presentations and subsequent discussions had emphasised the importance of action and made the issues feel more “official”.

While protection of the most vulnerable was a theme throughout the day, some said they felt more strongly about the need to protect those who are more financially vulnerable in particular. This is somewhat reflected in the change in the polling questions between the morning and afternoon, with an increase in those saying that people with the highest income should pay more.

## 6 Conclusions

This research has provided insights into consumers' views on Northern Ireland's transition to net zero and their priorities for achieving a Just Transition in the context of the decarbonisation of energy. The overarching findings from the deliberative process are outlined below, structured around the three key questions posed to participants. These provide an indication of the types of areas in which the Utility Regulator can help support Northern Ireland energy consumers towards a Just Transition.

### 6.1 Aspects of the transition that energy consumers are most concerned about

Cost was the overriding concern for participants. This largely related to the upfront cost of changing home energy systems such as installing a heat pump, solar panels or other renewable energy sources. Heat pumps in particular were perceived to be expensive for most consumers. There were also concerns about the potential long-term costs to consumers, with a perception that the running costs of heat pumps may lead to higher energy bills.

Concerns about costs were compounded by a perception that consumers may be required to continually change their heating systems as technologies develop or government expectations change. This was of particular concern to participants that had only recently changed to gas central heating, and who felt they were being asked to pay to change systems again.

Aside from costs, there were concerns about the practicalities of making home energy changes. It was felt that the age and condition of some properties would mean that the scale of work required to support a change in heating system would cause significant disruption and would be prohibitively expensive. There was also a sense of distrust in new technologies. For example, there was some scepticism about the reliability of heat pumps and uncertainty about their effectiveness as a home heating source. These concerns were seen as potential barriers to transitioning to these cleaner heating systems.

A final concern was that consumers lacked information about the changes they were being expected or required to make, the options available to them to make those changes, and the associated costs. There was a desire for greater transparency about what the changes required might mean for consumers' households, how it would impact them, and the benefits to consumers.

### 6.2 How we can make the transition to net zero just and fair for consumers

Reflecting the high levels of concern about the cost of the transition, participants felt that financial support for consumers was a key priority for achieving a Just Transition. As a minimum it was felt that this should be provided to those least able to afford the actions required to help reach net zero, including those with lower incomes. More broadly it was felt that groups that were in vulnerable circumstances or had a greater reliance on home energy, such as those with health conditions, should be protected from the costs of the transition. Suggestions of specific types of support included grants, interest free loans, or exemptions from charges.

Transparent information and communication emerged as strong themes. Access to clear, simple, and accessible information was considered crucial for a Just Transition, as this would help consumers to make informed decisions about what actions they could take. This included information on the options costs of more energy efficient or renewable energy sources, the benefits for consumers investing in these technologies and the choices that consumers had to increase their energy efficiency. It was suggested that there could be a "one-stop shop" to provide independent advice for consumers about their responsibilities, the options available to them, and the costs. Participants also specifically emphasised the importance of non-price-based protections for vulnerable consumers, such as clear, independent and accessible information on what actions they were expected to take and what sources of support were available to them.

Governance and accountability were also considered important, with calls for independent oversight of the transition in the energy sector, ensuring that both public sector and private companies act in the public's best interest, with increased transparency over decision-making.

### **6.3 Who should pay for the changes that will be needed**

Participants felt there was a collective responsibility for the costs of the transition, believing that government, industry, and the public should share the financial burden. It was felt that government should take the lead by funding a significant share of the costs of the transition, and through providing grants, loans and subsidies for consumers. Energy companies were seen as having a responsibility for covering a share of the costs, particularly those with high profits. While it was felt that consumers also had a role to play, participants strongly emphasised the need to protect vulnerable groups through targeted financial support.

Discussions around potential systems of payment revealed the complexity of finding a fair approach, with participants identifying potential drawbacks of each of the hypothetical scenarios. A system of payment based on level of emissions was seen as penalising people who live in older, less energy-efficient homes while benefiting individuals with newer homes and more financial resources. A system based on level of income was thought to unjustly penalise higher earners who had already invested in energy efficiency improvements or taken other steps to reduce their carbon emissions. While incentives for consumer were appealing, funding these through taxation and charges was criticised for placing too much responsibility and financial burden on consumers.

Across each the potential pricing scenarios, a number of suggestions were made to help make these fairer for consumers. These included:

- Allowing individual circumstances to be borne in mind, potentially through a form of means-testing that was based on ability to pay, not just household income.
- Regulatory measures to protect consumers from having the costs of the transition passed on to them through price increases from businesses or rent increases by landlords.

- Capping the level of charges or levies consumers were expected to pay, even for those on higher incomes, and providing some exemptions for individuals that had already significantly invested in reducing their carbon emissions.
- Providing clear and transparent information about how consumer costs are calculated and how any financial incentives are allocated.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Discussion Guide

### Utility Regulator Just Transition Deliberative workshop - Belfast Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2025 Discussion Guide v7

- In person, with 50 participants
- Main Boardroom in venue for Plenary sessions & breakouts x 4, other spaces in venue for 3 x tables (1 Ipsos moderator and 7-8 participants per table)
- Screen at front of room for Chair/ Speakers

Timings	Objective	Discussion
9.30-10.00 <b>Set up</b>	<i>Set up, welcome participants, get participants connected to Menti</i>	<p>Arrival and Registration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On arrival participants will be welcomed by Ipsos, given a name tag and allocated their table</li> <li>• Table moderators will welcome participants at their tables</li> <li>• Presentation screen will be showing a welcome message and information on access to Menti.com</li> <li>• Facilitators will support those who need it (i.e. helping them get online, showing them how to use the website etc) For those without a smart device, paper copies of the questions will be provided so that they can participate (these results can be added to the data after the session)</li> </ul>
10.00-10.20 <b>Plenary</b>	<i>Welcome and introduction to the day</i>	<p><b>Welcome from IPSOS CHAIR</b></p> <p>Who we are and why we're all here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair to welcome and thank everyone</li> <li>• Introduce self and explain who Ipsos is.</li> <li>• Chair to introduce poll and ask participants to answer questions:</li> </ul> <p><b>“What sort of energy source do you use to heat your home?”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gas</b></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Oil</b></li><li>• <b>Electric</b></li><li>• <b>Heat pumps</b></li><li>• <b>Biomass</b></li><li>• <b>Other</b></li><li>• <b>Don't know</b></li></ul> <p><b>“How much would you say you know about the term “net zero?”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>A great deal</b></li><li>• <b>A fair amount</b></li><li>• <b>Not that much</b></li><li>• <b>Nothing at all</b></li><li>• <b>Don't know</b></li></ul> <p><b>“How much would you say you know about the term “decarbonisation of energy”?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>A great deal</b></li><li>• <b>A fair amount</b></li><li>• <b>Not that much</b></li><li>• <b>Nothing at all</b></li><li>• <b>Don't know</b></li></ul> <p><b>“Who do you think should be responsible for tackling climate change in Northern Ireland”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The public</b></li><li>• <b>Business and industry</b></li><li>• <b>Government</b></li><li>• <b>All of these groups</b></li><li>• <b>None of these groups</b></li><li>• <b>Don't know</b></li></ul> <p><b>“Who should pay more for the changes that might be needed (such as replacing oil and gas with cleaner energy sources)?”</b></p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>People who contribute the most carbon emissions</b></li> <li>• <b>People with higher incomes</b></li> <li>• <b>People who would find it easiest to make those changes</b></li> <li>• <b>Everyone should pay equally</b></li> <li>• <b>None of these groups should pay</b></li> <li>• <b>Don't know</b></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair closes poll and comments on results before providing a summary of the overall purpose of the session and why we are here. Share aims of the research: <p><i>To explore consumer's views on what a just transition to net zero would mean for Northern Ireland, who should pay for the changes needed to facilitate the just transition to net zero, and how we can make sure that the transition is as fair as possible.</i></p> </li> </ul> <p><b>MOVES ON TO INTRODUCTION TO THE SESSION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain who is here: people from different parts of Northern Ireland, Utility Regulator, expert presenters, Ipsos moderators.</li> <li>• Explain purpose of the workshop, emphasising that they will find out more detail as they go along.</li> <li>• Highlight their role / the key issues that they are helping the Utility Regulator to understand</li> <li>• Show overarching questions that we will seek to answer throughout the discussions and the course of the day:</li> </ul> <p><b>As we transition to net zero in Northern Ireland's energy sector,</b></p> <p><b>1. What aspects of the transition are you, as an energy consumer, most concerned about?</b></p>
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		<p><b>2. How can we make sure the transition is just and fair for consumers?</b></p> <p><b>3. Who should pay for the changes that will be needed?</b></p> <p>What today will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of presentations, questions, table discussion and exercises</li> <li>• Emphasise importance of contributing to the table discussions – we are here for their views</li> <li>• Show slide with timings (including breaks, lunch, finish)</li> </ul> <p>Explain tone and nature of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal and respectful</li> <li>• No right or wrong answers</li> <li>• There are no silly questions/ comments. We're here to hear what you think</li> <li>• Avoid talking over one another</li> <li>• You may not all agree with what you are hearing but please do respect each other's views and experience</li> </ul> <p>Consent and housekeeping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality – comments will not be attributed back to you in our report, and no personal data will be shared.</li> <li>• Audio recording will be used (with consent).</li> <li>• Housekeeping (including use of mobile phones, emergency exits etc,)</li> </ul>
<p><b>10.20 – 10.40 (20 Mins)  Breakout</b></p>	<p><i>Introducing participants to group and facilitator, warm-up and gathering of initial views</i></p>	<p><b>TABLE FACILITATORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators to introduce themselves, explain audio-recording will be used for small groups discussion throughout the day and get permission to use (and repeated for the record).</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NOTE TO FACILITATOR:</b> Some participants may ask questions about billing/price increases in GB or NI, or may comment on personal situations relating to bills, the cost-of-living crisis, or the impacts of Storm Eowyn. If this happens at any points, please respond as follows:   “Thank you for raising those points. I will have to move us on for now, as I want to bring us back to the issues we’re focussing on today which are about the move to net zero and how we make that fair. But if there is anything specific you would like to pick up more with the Utility Regulator, we can ask them to speak to you about that over the break/over lunch/at the end.”</li> </ul> <p><b>Introductions and scene-setting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Please tell me your first name, where you live and what you would probably be doing if you weren’t here today</b></li> <li>• <b>As Ciaran said in the introduction, we will be talking about a Just Transition to net zero in Northern Ireland. Before today, had you given much thought to the topics we are going to be discussing in today’s session?</b></li> <li>• <b>To start us off, what words, phrases or images come to mind when you hear the term ‘climate change’?</b></li> <li>• <b>“Net zero” was mentioned in the introduction. What does net zero mean to you?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is it something you’ve thought about much before today?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Before today had you heard the term “just transition to net zero?”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ IF YES – where had you come across this before? What did you think about it?</li> <li>○ IF NO – what do you think it is about?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>And before today had you heard the term “decarbonisation of energy”?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ IF YES – where had you come across this before? What did you think about it?</li> <li>○ IF NO – what do you think it is about?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10.40-10.55	<i>Provide an overview of the</i>	<b>Presentation 1: Introduction to net zero and Just Transition – Aoife Foley</b>

<p><b>(15 mins)</b></p> <p><b>Plenary</b></p>	<p><i>key concepts including introduction to the idea of Just Transition</i></p>	<p>Presentation to help participants understand the key concepts of the idea of a Just Transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we mean by 'climate change'? (referring to the 'climate emergency' declared by NI Assembly)</li> <li>• What do we mean by 'net zero'? (referring to Northern Ireland's net zero ambitions and energy related targets)</li> <li>• What might reaching net zero in Northern Ireland mean for us all?</li> <li>• What sorts of changes would decarbonising energy mean to us and our households?</li> <li>• What would a Just Transition to net zero mean? (focussing on key principles)</li> </ul>
<p><b>10.55-11.05</b></p> <p><b>(10 mins)</b></p>	<p><i>Provide information on the energy sector and the likely changes required to transition to net zero</i></p>	<p><b>Presentation 2: Energy in Northern Ireland – Kevin Sheils</b></p> <p>Presentation to help participants understand how the energy sector works in Northern Ireland, the relationship between energy and the transition to net zero, and what changes might be necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we mean when we say 'energy'</li> <li>• How the energy system works - different ways energy gets into our homes, who provides it, how we pay for it, etc.</li> <li>• Key players in the energy sector - who are the key organisations and what do they do (including difference between network operators and suppliers, and reference to the role of the Utility Regulator)</li> <li>• How might the energy sector need to change in future as we transition to net zero?</li> <li>• What benefits does this offer the sector and consumers?</li> <li>• What issues / challenges / questions does this raise for the sector and for consumers?</li> </ul>
<p><b>11.05-11.35</b></p> <p><b>Breakout</b></p>	<p><i>To hear participants reflections on the information provided and give them the chance to generate questions</i></p>	<p>HALF THE GROUP MOVE INTO THE SECOND ROOM / SMALLER MEETING ROOMS TO ALLOW MORE SPACE / QUIET FOR DETAILED TABLE DISCUSSIONS</p> <p><b>Reflections on presentations</b> <b>TABLE FACILITATORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What stood out to you from the information we just heard?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Was there anything you learned that has changed your views?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>What concerns or issues did the presentations raise for you?</b></li><li>• <b>What did you think about the idea of a Just Transition?</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What do you understand this to mean?</li><li>○ How important does it feel to you?</li></ul></li><li>• <b>How realistic do you think Northern Ireland’s target of reaching net zero by 2050 is?</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Should it be sooner, later, or is it about right?</li><li>○ How long do you think would be needed for the changes to be made?</li></ul></li><li>• <b>What did you think about the potential changes that were discussed in relation to a just transition to net zero?</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Who do you think would be able pay for those changes?</li><li>○ And who do you think <i>should</i> pay for those changes?</li></ul></li><li>• <b>How would these changes feel for you?</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Would they have any positive impacts for you?</li><li>○ Would they pose any challenges?</li></ul></li><li>• <b>Has anyone already made any changes to the energy they use in their homes, such as installing a more energy efficient boiler, heat pump or other renewable technologies IF YES: What factors influenced your decision?</b></li></ul> <p><b>Question gathering (5mins):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Let’s have a think about any questions, if any, that you have for the speakers?</b></li><li>• <b>What are our priority questions?</b></li><li>• <b>As we have a lot to get through today, once we have the Q&amp;A session with the speakers, I will pass the questions to Ciaran to ask on behalf of the group.</b></li></ul>
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11.35-11.45		<b>BREAK – FACILITATORS SEND PARTICIPANTS ON BREAK WHEN READY AND ASK THEM TO MOVE INTO MAIN ROOM BY 11.45</b>
11.45-12.10  <b>Plenary</b>	<i>To ensure participants are clear on the information provided</i>	EVERYONE MOVES BACK INTO MAIN ROOM  <b>Panel style Q&amp;A with experts/speakers</b>
12.10-12.30	<i>To take stock of current views on what a just transition might look like</i>	MOVE BACK TO BREAK OUT ROOMS – WILL REMAIN HERE FOR MOST OF THE DAY  <b>Consolidating current views:</b>  POST-IT EXERCISE (AT TABLES) – PARTICIPANTS ASKED TO WRITE THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS <b>“TO MAKE THE TRANSITION TO NET ZERO ENERGY AS JUST AS POSSIBLE, WE SHOULD……”</b>  FACILITATORS HAVE A LARGE SHEET OF PAPER ON EACH TABLE WITH QUESTION WRITTEN AT THE TOP. PARTICIPANTS WRITE THEIR ANSWER ON POST-ITS AND STICK ON THE SHEET OF PAPER. FACILITATOR INVITES A FEW PEOPLE TO EXPLAIN THEIR ANSWER (AS MANY PEOPLE AS TIME ALLOWS).  FACILITATORS WILL HAVE THIS TO HAND THROUGHOUT THE DAY AND IT CAN BE ADDED TO BY PARTICIPANTS AT ANY POINT.
12.30-13.10		<b>LUNCH</b>
13.10-13.15  <b>Breakout</b>	<i>To clarify plan for the afternoon</i>	Facilitator to remind participants of the original questions that were shown by Ciaran at the start, and that this will be the focus for the afternoon discussions/exercises HAVE QUESTIONS ON A FEW HANDOUTS TO SHARE AT THIS POINT:  <b>As we transition to net zero in Northern Ireland’s energy sector,</b>  <b>1. What aspects of the transition are you, as an energy consumer, most concerned about?</b>  <b>2. How can we make sure the transition is just and fair for consumers?</b>

		<p><b>3. Who should pay for the changes that will be needed?</b></p>
13.15-14.00	<p><b>Group Discussions:</b> Where we are aiming to go / what might happen next</p>	<p><b>TABLE FACILITATORS</b></p> <p><b>We are now going to spend some time thinking about what might happen next and where we are aiming to go in Northern Ireland in relation to the Just Transition to net zero. This afternoon, we would really like to hear more from you about how this might impact on consumers, and what we need to do to make that fair.</b></p> <p><b>As you have heard, the transition to net zero will mean changes that affect all of us. It might mean making our homes more energy efficient, for example by putting in insulation or changing windows or doors. It might also mean changing the type of energy we use in our homes, such as replacing gas boilers, installing heat pumps, or using other types of clean energy systems. And, as you have heard, these things come at a cost.</b></p> <p><b>As well as changes in our homes, the electricity network will need to be upgraded, jobs in the energy sector are also changing, as we move away from fossil fuels to cleaner sources of energy.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Firstly thinking about your own households, what would these sorts of changes mean for you and what concerns do you have? PROBE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What benefits would they offer?</li> <li>○ What challenges would they pose?</li> <li>○ What would help make them easier?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Thinking about different groups of people in society, who do you think would find the transition easiest? PROMPT IF NEEDED</b> What about people of different ages, health, income levels? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you feel about that?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- What would make that feel fairer to you?

Group	First character	Second character	Third character (if time)
Adam	James and Emma	Lee	Christopher
Ciaran	Mary and David	Ajay and Jenny	James and Emma
Emma	Lee	Christopher	Mary and David
Emily	Ajay and Jenny	James and Emma	Lee
Harry	Christopher	Mary and David	Ajay and Jenny
Lauren	James and Emma	Lee	Christopher
Matt	Mary and David	Ajay and Jenny	James and Emma

- **Are there any groups of people that you think would be at risk of losing out or being left behind?**
  - How do you feel about that?
  - What would make that feel fairer to you?
- **Are there any groups of people that should be supported before others to make changes as part of the transition?**

**INTRODUCE CHARACTERS – EACH TABLE AIM TO COVER 2 EACH (ORDER WILL BE ROTATED BETWEEN TABLES)**

Let’s look at how these sorts of changes might impact on different types of people. I’m going to introduce some “characters” who have different circumstances, and I want us think about what the transition to net zero might mean for them.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS PROVIDED IN THE SUPPORT POWERPOINT DECK

ORDER FOR CHARACTERS (OVERLEAF)

		<p><b>For each one ask:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>What changes might they need to make to help with the transition to net zero energy?</b></li> <li>- <b>What impact would that have on them?</b></li> <li>- <b>Should they be responsible for the costs of that?</b></li> <li>- <b>What would help make this as fair?</b></li> <li>- <b>Would anything be needed to help support or make this easier for them?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2.00-3.00</b></p> <p><b>(with a 10 minute break from 2.30-2.40)</b></p>	<p><b>Scenarios discussion</b></p>	<p><b><u>SCENARIOS FOR PAYMENT MODELS: ROTATE SCENARIOS ACROSS TABLES</u></b></p> <p><b>We would like to move on now to talk about the cost of a Just Transition to net zero energy and how this might be fairly achieved. To help us to think about this, we are going to look at a few different hypothetical scenarios.</b></p> <p>Facilitator note: If conversation moves towards price increases or any focus on specific questions around billing/tariffs/ costs to the individual – refer back to agreed wording from the beginning of the session and focus participants to the broader discussion around willingness to pay in principle/ exploring the idea of fairness in relation to payment models.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Before we do, thinking about the costs of the transition to net zero across the energy system in Northern Ireland, who do currently think should pay those costs?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Should it be government, businesses, the energy sector/companies, the public?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>How do you think we can make the system of payment fair?</b>  <b>[If not already covered]: Should the system of payment be based on:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Levels of emission?</li> <li>○ Ability to pay?</li> <li>○ Ability to make changes/ have a say on changes to your home?</li> <li>○ Protecting vulnerable groups?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Anything else?</li> </ul> <p><b>We'll now focus on a few different scenarios which could reflect a potential payment structure in relation to the transition to net zero.</b></p> <p><b>FACILITATOR NOTE: Please reiterate to participants that the following scenarios are hypothetical. The scenarios presented do not represent any options that have been developed by the Utility Regulator. The scenarios are simply designed to generate broader discussion on how payment could possibly be imagined and to understand what consumers feel is fair.</b></p> <p>FACILITATOR TO INTRODUCE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS AND FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Those who emit the most pay the most</b></li> <li>• <b>Those with higher incomes/ ability to pay, pay the most</b></li> <li>• <b>Everyone pays with incentives available to support changes made</b></li> </ul> <p><b>SCENARIO 1: THOSE WHO EMIT THE MOST PAY THE MOST:</b>  <i>Costs associated with the transition could be covered through taxing higher emitting industries and through and other charges for people who contribute the most emissions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What do you think of this system?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are appealing?</li> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are unappealing?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Do you think this system is fair or unfair?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects seem fair?</li> <li>○ What aspects seem unfair?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>How, if at all, do you think this scenario would impact you personally?</b></li> </ul> <p>FACILITATOR REFER BACK TO CHARACTERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who would stand to benefit the most from this system?</b></li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who would lose out?</b></li> <li>• <b>How could we make this system more fair?</b></li> </ul> <p><b>SEND PARTICIPANTS ON BREAK</b></p> <p><b>SCENARIO 2: THOSE WITH HIGHER INCOMES PAY THE MOST:</b>  <i>Costs associated with a Just Transition could be covered through a type of ‘net zero’ levy, applied to energy bills of those in Northern Ireland earning over a certain amount. This could be progressive levy, meaning the more someone earns, the higher the additional charge would be.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What do you think of this system?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are appealing?</li> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are unappealing?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Do you think this system is fair or unfair?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects seem fair?</li> <li>○ What aspects seem unfair?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>How, if at all, do you think this scenario would impact you personally?</b></li> </ul> <p>FACILITATOR REFER BACK TO CHARACTERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who would stand to benefit the most from this system?</b></li> <li>• <b>Who would lose out?</b></li> <li>• <b>How could we make this system more fair?</b></li> </ul> <p><b>SCENARIO 3: EVERYONE PAYS WITH INCENTIVES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT CHANGES:</b>  <i>There could be incentives to making low carbon choices (for example grants/subsidies). Those grants / subsidies would be funded through a combination of increased general taxation and higher charges for consumers.</i></p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What do you think of this system?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are appealing?</li> <li>○ What aspects, if any, are unappealing?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Do you think this system is fair or unfair?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What aspects seem fair?</li> <li>○ What aspects seem unfair?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>How, if at all, do you think this scenario would impact you personally?</b></li> </ul> <p>FACILITATOR REFER BACK TO CHARACTERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who would stand to benefit the most from this system?</b></li> <li>• <b>Who would lose out?</b></li> <li>• <b>How could we make this system more fair?</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>3.00-3.40 Breakout</b></p>		<p><b>Final Discussions/Reflections TABLE FACILITATORS</b></p> <p><b>Answering key questions (30 minutes)</b></p> <p><b>For our final discussion today, we’re going to bring together everything we’ve learned and discussed and hopefully come up with some final reflections or conclusions as a group in relation to the questions that the Chair shared at the beginning of the session.</b></p> <p><b>The aim is that we form some ideas about what the Utility Regulator should focus on in relation to the Just Transition.</b></p> <p>REMINDER OF THE KEY QUESTIONS:</p> <p><b>As we transition to net zero in Northern Ireland’s energy sector,</b></p>

		<p><b>1. What aspects of the transition are you, as an energy consumer, most concerned about?</b></p> <p><b>2. How can we make sure the transition is just and fair for consumers?</b></p> <p><b>3. Who should pay for the changes that will be needed?</b></p> <p>FACILTATOR: MOVE THROUGH THE KEY QUESTIONS AND ASK PARTICIPANTS TO PROVIDE THEIR TOP OF MIND THOUGHTS ON WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE KEY FOR EACH QUESTION. REITERATE THAT WE ARE NOT ASKING PARTICIPANTS TO SELECT A FINAL SYSTEM OF PAYMENT, BUT OVERALL WE ARE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO THEM.</p> <p><b>Other concluding questions (10 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Have your views on a Just Transition to net zero changed from the beginning of the session? Why is that?</b></li> <li>• <b>As a consumer, what do you think should be prioritised for someone like you when thinking about the transition?</b></li> <li>• <b>Did you feel that any of the hypothetical payment scenarios were more fair than the others? Why do you say that?</b></li> <li>• <b>Is there anything we haven't covered, that you feel would be important to add?</b></li> </ul>
<b>3.35-3.50</b>		ALL GROUPS MOVE BACK INTO THE MAIN ROOM. EACH FACILITORS GIVES FEEDBACK FROM THEIR GROUP, SUMMARISING THEIR ANSWERS TO THE 3 QUESTIONS.

3.50-4.00		<p><b>WRAP UP</b></p> <p><b>Chair thanks everyone for their input and summarise what will happen next.</b></p> <p><b>Closing poll: repeat the final poll question that was shared at the beginning of the session to understand if views have changed.</b></p> <p><b>“Who do you think should be responsible for tackling climate change in Northern Ireland”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The public</b></li> <li>• <b>Business and industry</b></li> <li>• <b>Government</b></li> <li>• <b>All of these groups</b></li> <li>• <b>None of these groups</b></li> <li>• <b>Don’t know</b></li> </ul> <p><b>“Who should pay more for the changes that might be needed (such as replacing oil and gas with cleaner energy sources)?”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>People who contribute the most carbon emissions</b></li> <li>• <b>People with higher incomes</b></li> <li>• <b>People who would find it easiest to make those changes</b></li> <li>• <b>Everyone should pay equally</b></li> <li>• <b>None of these groups should pay</b></li> <li>• <b>Don’t know</b></li> </ul> <p><b>UR to thank participants.</b></p> <p><b>CLOSE</b></p>
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## Appendix 2 - Research stimuli used during the workshop

Figure 6.1: Persona 1- James and Emma

### James and Emma

James (42) and Emma (40) are a couple living in Lisburn. They have three children, Noah (aged 10), Mark (aged 8) and Katie (aged 7).

The family live in a detached house, which they own.

The home has a high level of energy efficiency. It has gas central heating and triple-glazed windows. A few years ago, James and Emma also added loft and cavity wall insulation.

They now want to replace their gas heating system with a heat pump. They also want to add some solar panels to their roof, to help generate electricity.

James and Emma's combined income is £115,000 per year.



**Figure 6.2: Persona 2 – Mary and David**

## Mary and David

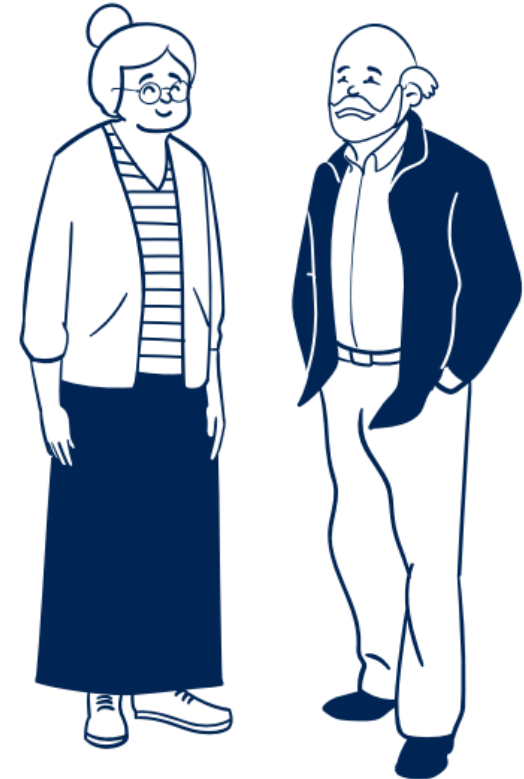
Mary (75) and David (76) are a married couple.

They live in a terraced house in Belfast, which they rent from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. They have lived in the house for over 20 years.

The house has an average level of energy efficiency. It has gas heating and double glazing. However, the couple have noticed a draught coming from the front door which is making the house colder. They cannot afford to use any more central heating, so they want the draught fixed.

Any changes to the property (such as upgrading the heating system or improving the insulation) are the responsibility of the Housing Executive.

Mary and David's both receive a state pension and benefits, and their combined annual income is roughly £40,000.



**Figure 6.3: Persona 3 – Lee**

## Lee

Lee is 36 years old. She lives in a ground floor flat in Strabane, which she rents from a private landlord. She lives there with her daughter, Ella (7 years old).

The flat has a very low level of energy efficiency. It has electric heaters and double glazing, but it has poor insulation. Lee often notices draughts in each room. In winter months they occasionally need to use portable electric heaters to stay warm, but Lee struggles to afford this.

Any changes to the property (such as upgrading the heating system, or improving the insulation) are the responsibility of the owner, Lee's landlord.

Lee's income is £22,000 per year.



**Figure 6.4: Persona 4 – Ajay and Jenny**

## Ajay and Jenny

Ajay (36) and Jenny (35) live together in a semi-detached house in Garrison, roughly 12 miles from Enniskillen. They own their home.

A few years ago Jenny was diagnosed with a health condition which means she needs to use a dialysis machine three times per week. The machine runs off electricity in the home, meaning their electricity bill is much higher than it used to be.

The house has a very low level of energy efficiency. It uses oil heating and has poor insulation. The couple would like to upgrade their heating system to natural gas, but their property is not currently connected to the gas grid.

Jenny and Ajay's combined income is roughly £64,000.



Figure 6.5: Persona 5 – Christopher

## Christopher

Christopher is 29 years old and lives in Ballymena. He lives in a three-bedroom terrace house which he owns.

Christopher is self-employed and runs a small IT business from home assisting other businesses with computer issues. He needs to run several servers from his office, which run 24/7.

The house has an average level of energy efficiency. It has gas central heating, but his home office has temperature swings. It gets cold in winter meaning Christopher often uses an electric heater. But it gets very warm in summer, meaning Christopher uses a plug in air conditioner to cool down.

Christopher would like to improve the insulation in the home. He would also like to install a heat pump, but is not sure if they are suitable for his property.

Christopher's income is £49,000.



**Figure 6.6: Scenario 1: Those who emit the most pay the most**

## Scenario 1: Those who emit the most pay the most

Costs associated with the transition could be covered through taxing higher emitting industries and through levies and other charges for people who contribute the most emissions.



**Figure 6.7: Scenario 2: Those with higher incomes pay the most**

## Scenario 2: Those with higher incomes pay the most

Costs associated with the transition could be covered through a type of 'net zero' levy, applied to energy bills of those in Northern Ireland earning over a certain amount.



This would be a progressive levy, meaning the more someone earns, the higher the additional charge would be.



Figure 6.8: Scenario 3: Everyone pays, with incentives available to support changes

## Scenario 3: Everyone pays, with incentives available to support changes

There could be incentives for making low carbon choices (for example grants or subsidies).

Those grants or subsidies would be funded through a combination of increased general taxation and higher charges for consumers.



## Appendix 3 - Profile of participants

Table 6.1: Profile of participant

Demographic	Target	Number achieved
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	25	24
Female	25	24
In another way		1
<b>Age bands</b>		
18-29	9	7
30-44	13	11
45-59	13	18
60+	15	13
<b>SEG</b>		
ABC1	22	28
C2DE	28	21
<b>Urban or rural location</b>		
Urban	30	29
Rural	20	20

Demographic	Target	Number achieved
<b>Disability (long term health problem or disability)</b>		
Day-to-day activities limited a lot	5	7
Day-to-day activities limited a little	7	3
Day-to-day activities not limited	38	38
<b>Ethnic Minority</b>		
White/ Irish Traveller	49	48
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups		
Asian/Asian British		
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British		
Other Ethnic group	3	1
<b>Household heating source</b>		
Oil only	25	23
Mains gas only	20	22
Two or more types of central heating	3	3
Other	2	1

# Our standards and accreditations

Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



## ISO 20252

This is the international specific standard for market, opinion and social research, including insights and data analytics. Ipsos UK was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



## Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos UK endorse and support the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commit to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation & we were the first company to sign our organisation up to the requirements & self-regulation of the MRS Code; more than 350 companies have followed our lead.



## ISO 9001

International general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994 we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



## ISO 27001

International standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos UK was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



## The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)

Ipsos UK is required to comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA). These cover the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



## HMG Cyber Essentials

Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet. This is a government-backed, key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos UK was assessed and validated for certification in 2016.



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# For more information

3 Thomas More Square  
London  
E1W 1YW

t: +44 (0)20 3059 5000

[www.ipsos.com/en-uk](http://www.ipsos.com/en-uk)  
<http://twitter.com/ipsosUK>

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