

NI STRATEGIC ENERGY FRAMEWORK 2009

Pre Consultation Scoping Paper – Response from the NI Housing Executive (Home Energy Conservation Authority)

The paper poses a series of questions on energy policy. Many of these questions related to wider strategic issues on energy and do not impact on the Housing Executive's HECA role.

It is proposed, therefore, that our response focus on those questions which are deemed to be relevant to our housing and HECA roles. It was disappointing to note, however, that once again a DETI document relating to energy did not acknowledge the Housing Executive's role as HECA Authority, particularly in relation to the section on energy efficiency.

Our response in relation to the specific questions posed on pages 37- 40, which are relevant to housing, is as follows;

Gas

(a) Should there be increased penetration of natural gas within the existing licensed areas to displace oil usage in particular, and should any gas uptake be incentivised to encourage customer switching from other fossil fuels?

There should be increased penetration of natural gas within the existing licensed areas to reduce the over dependence of NI households on oil.

(b) Should the gas transmission network in NI be extended to provide natural gas to new areas, such as Omagh, Strabane, and Enniskillen in the west, even though the economic case for doing so may not be strong?

As NIHE has not seen the economic case for extending gas to Omagh, Strabane and Enniskillen it cannot comment on whether the gas network should be extended there. However, if it is extended, it is likely that our policy of installing gas heating, where available, would apply to NIHE stock in these areas.

(d) What benefits would be provided for Northern Ireland energy consumers if natural gas storage was available in Northern Ireland, and/or a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility was available in the Republic of Ireland?

The main benefit of gas storage facilities in Northern Ireland and LNG in the Rep. of Ireland is increased security of supply. A potential benefit could be reduced costs, particularly if such storage facilities are filled when prices are lower.

(e) In light of declining UK gas reserves and increasing dependency on imports, should natural gas still be considered as the principal long term fuel source for power generation, and commercial and domestic energy requirements in NI?

Yes. Whilst there is currently dependence on imports from a small number of regions, in the longer term LNG can be sourced from elsewhere in the world to supply existing gas installations.

Sustainable Energy

(b) How should the necessary costs of increased investment in renewable energy and associated infrastructure be balanced with the need to minimise the cost of energy to the consumer and how should such costs be shared between present and future consumers?

The Executive recognises that one way or another, consumers will meet these costs either through taxes or tariffs for buying renewable energy. One way of meeting these costs might be via a review of Building Regulations with a view to ensuring that a percentage of energy use is met from renewables in future newbuild including housing. This will help meet Government targets on low energy and zero carbon housing and help create a market for renewables that ultimately will drive installations costs down, thereby benefiting everyone.

(c) Should Northern Ireland include significantly increased levels of micro-generation as part of the energy mix going forward? If so, should NI concentrate on specific technologies?

Yes, in terms of household renewables as a form of micro-generation. In particular, NI should focus on wood pellet boilers, solar thermal panels and heat pumps. In addition to improving energy efficiency, some of these systems are manufactured locally. There are economic benefits for manufacturers, installers and users of these technologies.

(f) Should Northern Ireland roll out smart metering?

Yes, if there is evidence from elsewhere in the UK or EU that they bring benefits to consumers. No, if the costs of rolling out these meters outweigh any benefits.

(g) DETI believes that energy efficiency and managing demand are key contributing factors in meeting our climate change targets. How can energy efficiency activities in Northern Ireland best be co-ordinated?

NIHE reports on its HECA role annually to the DSD Minister. All Departments with a role in energy efficiency should report annually on progress to their respective Ministers. DETI could take an overall co-ordinating role on this.

Security of Supply

(a) What are the priorities for Northern Ireland and what measures do we need to take including working with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, to deliver a long term, reliable and balanced energy mix?

More research and assessment of the roles for wind, biomass, energy from waste and tidal power in our future energy mix.

(b) To what extent should government rely on commercial forces to provide security and diversity of supply?

It should not totally rely on commercial forces as markets can experience crisis or even collapse. Recent events in the banking sector are an example of markets getting into difficulty.

(c) What should the power generation mix look like in 2015, 2020, and beyond in order to provide security and diversity of supply.

The Executive recognises and agrees that a wider debate is required on a range of alternative fuels for the future and that the debate will have to address whether or not there is a role for nuclear power.

NI Housing Executive
(Home Energy Conservation Authority)
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