



Healthy Homes for Skye, Raasay & Lochalsh

Summary of the Healthy Homes for Skye, Raasay & Lochalsh survey December 2023

The Healthy Homes survey provides the first **detailed, community-led, all-tenure, housing condition and energy efficiency information specific to Skye, Raasay & Lochalsh**, based on 426 responses or 6% of households. The survey presents the perspective of our local community, and reveals notably worse housing conditions than recorded in government statistics for The Highland Council area and Scotland as a whole.

Our survey found that our area has particular and severe challenges in terms of

- (1) the state of repair of homes and
- (2) the availability of affordable and effective means of upgrading them.

This results in homes that leak heat which, coupled with reliance on expensive electricity for heating, means people ration energy and can't keep their homes warm in winter, while generating a higher carbon footprint.

- Nineteen percent of homes were never or rarely warm enough in winter and only 12% were fully warm in winter.
- Many homes suffered from draughts (36%) and moderate to severe mould or damp (37%). Only one third of homes indicated they had no concerns over mould or damp.
- Two-thirds of homes (67%) were poorly insulated.
- There is no mains gas supply, the majority rely on expensive mains electricity, leading to 32% of homes economising on heating often, with fuel poverty affecting an estimated 51%.
- The most common type of dwelling was old, solid stone-walled or concrete-walled homes (38%). These homes have many severe repair and insulation problems that need to be addressed before heating systems can be upgraded.
- Fifty to sixty percent of homes needed repairs to windows, damp proofing, wall/loft/ underfloor insulation or upgrading their heating system.

Our survey asked both home owners and tenants about the advice, repairs and upgrades they needed

- Sixty-four percent of householders wanted advice on affordable warmth, but 48% had not received any.
- The main barrier to getting homes repaired and upgraded was the cost (60% of homes).
- Not knowing what to do to improve the home, unavailability of builders, the disruption involved in renovations, and unavailability of grants were cited as barriers by a quarter of householders (25-29%).

Respondents' comments powerfully and movingly expressed their frustrations and despair at the difficulties of getting repairs done while contending with diverse regulations and funding schemes.

The survey report concludes that the answer lies in developing an accessible, local retrofit sector, that is able to repair and upgrade homes efficiently and to a good standard, and is trusted by the local community. The recommendations set out the next steps and further actions towards this aim.

Recommendations

Host an online conference to communicate the survey's findings and recommendations to the local community, retrofit practitioners, agencies, funders and politicians, sharing knowledge and experience and discussing solutions to improve housing quality and energy efficiency in our area.

Create a project team including a local steering group with relevant expertise, a paid project Development Officer and seed funding, in order to progress the actions below.

Set up a community retrofit hub (physical centre) for the community, providing information, advice, support and training resources for householders and tradespeople.

Showcase examples of best practice using existing buildings and/or pilot projects, to demonstrate the principles and best practice of retrofit work, and test approaches suited to our community, in partnership with community organisations and external agencies.

Strengthen the local retrofit workforce by engaging with construction and design businesses to understand their views of repair and upgrade work, while highlighting the potentially huge retrofit business opportunities, encouraging their involvement and rewarding achievements. Work with education, training and retrofit institutions and HIE to develop training provision and business support, and develop accreditation procedures adapted to small enterprises, while maintaining appropriate results.

Support self-help and community retrofit work with advice, training and mentoring to reduce repair and upgrade costs and increase skills within the community e.g. DIY draught protection, simple insulation and humidity management skills.

Improve financing and reduce costs of retrofit work by increasing access to grants and loans and seeking new funding sources, making grant criteria wider and more flexible, bulk retrofits and materials purchases, piloting cheaper energy-efficiency solutions and developing frameworks for costing different types of retrofit work.