1 Privacy Notice for Consumer Focus Groups: Evaluation of the Green Heat Network Fund

About this research

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) has commissioned an independent evaluation of the Green Heat Network Fund (GHNF). Fortia Insight, part of the RSK Group, is leading the evaluation on behalf of DESNZ, and GC Insight is supporting research delivery, including focus groups which are the focus of this privacy notice. This notice applies to focus groups with residential, commercial and public or institutional participants connected to GHNF-supported heat networks or projects. This privacy notice should give you all the information you need to help you to decide if you want to take part in the focus groups. If you would like to find out more, there are details at the end of this document about how to get in touch, and we would be happy to help.

Purpose of the focus groups

A focus group is a research method where a small group of people meets to discuss a specific topic. For this research, the focus groups will explore participants' experiences of heating and hot water, billing and costs, reliability, communications, customer service, satisfaction, benefits, challenges and understanding of net zero benefits. Findings will help DESNZ assess what is working, what could be improved, and how potential future heat network policy, delivery and consumer engagement should develop.

Why you have been contacted

You may have been identified as someone connected to a GHNF-supported heat network or project, for example as a residential customer or a commercial, public or institutional contact. Contact or sampling details have been supplied by DESNZ via Triple Point, the delivery partner for the GHNF scheme. Triple Point received this information from your heat network operator. We did not receive any named address information, and as such are sending 'to the occupier' letters. Your name has not been provided. This information has been provided solely to recruit people for this research.

What taking part involves

You may first be asked to complete a short screening or registration process to confirm you are eligible for the research. Registration does not guarantee selection. Participants will be selected to include an appropriate spread of relevant experiences and participant types across the heat networks included in the research. Selection may take account of eligibility, availability, the relevant heat network, participant type and the number of places available. The screening information will not be used to make decisions about access to services or benefits. You will join an online group facilitated by the research team, expected to last 60 to 90 minutes. This will take place on Microsoft Teams. If you have any difficulties using this platform, you can contact the research team for support.

Other participants will hear what you say, and your Teams display name may be visible to them during the session. We will ask everyone not to repeat what other people say outside the group, take screenshots or make their own recordings. However, because other people will be taking part, GC Insight cannot guarantee that every participant will keep the discussion confidential.

Please do not disclose information about another person or anything you would not be comfortable sharing in a group. It is very likely that your focus group will be with others on the same heat network as you.

The session will be recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams so that we can capture the discussion accurately and analyse it properly afterwards. We will explain this in the recruitment materials, registration form and this Privacy Notice, and you would need to provide consent to the recording and transcription before taking part. We will encourage you to use your camera because this can help the discussion feel more natural, but you may keep it off if you prefer. Teams meeting notes and GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment may also be used to help organise the research material and identify broad themes. Researchers will check and interpret all outputs. The technology will not make decisions about you or produce any outcome that affects you individually.

Taking part is voluntary. You may decline to take part, skip any question you are uncomfortable with or leave at any time without giving a reason. To join the focus group, however, you would need to provide consent in advance to the session being recorded and transcribed to allow for accurate analysis. Your decision will not affect any service or your relationship with any organisation involved. If you withdraw, we will explain what information can reasonably be removed. Once comments have been anonymised and combined, removal may no longer be possible.

All participants must be aged 18 or over, and the registration form will ask you to confirm this. We are not recruiting children. The form will also include an optional question about any support or adjustments you may need to take part in the online group. Where reasonably possible, this may include using Teams captions, keeping your camera off or receiving help to join the meeting. You do not need to tell us whether you have a disability unless you would like to be aware of that information.

If you voluntarily provide information about a health condition, disability or adjustment requirement, this may constitute special-category personal data. We will process this information only where necessary to arrange your participation and under the applicable condition of the UK GDPR. It will not be used to analyse or report research findings unless this has been explicitly explained.

Everyone who attends a focus group discussion will receive a £20 online Love2shop voucher as a thank-you for their time. Registering an interest will not, by itself, qualify you for the voucher.

Data we may process

- **Initial sampling and recruitment data:** postal address, UPRN or other address information used to send an invitation to the occupier. The initial sampling information supplied for postal recruitment does not include names.

- **Registration, eligibility and participation data:** your name and contact details; screening or registration answers; confirmation that you are aged 18 or over; a reference code or confirmation of your connection to the relevant heat network; participant type (whether you are residential, commercial or public/institutional participant); availability; preferred

contact method; permission to contact you; attendance; consent to recording and transcription; participation choices; and any optional support or adjustments you request.

- **Research data:** views, experiences, opinions and behaviours relevant to the discussion topics. For residential participants, registration data may also include whether you own or rent your home, including whether it is social housing; whether you live in a house, flat or another type of property; how long you have lived there; whether you pay separately for heating; and whether you have control over your heating. We will not collect more sensitive information unless it is needed for a proportionate recruitment purpose.

- **Recording and technology-assisted data:** voice, image if your camera is on, recording, transcript, Teams meeting notes, research notes, and material generated in GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment to help organise the research and identify broad themes.
- **Communications:** emails or messages concerning recruitment, participation, withdrawal or follow-up.

Please avoid sharing highly sensitive information unless it is relevant and you are comfortable doing so. If you choose to tell us about support or adjustments you need, we will use that information only to consider and arrange reasonable practical support for your participation. Any other sensitive information volunteered will be handled securely and analysed only where relevant and appropriate.

Sources and uses of the data

Teams may generate the recording, and transcript and meeting notes, and GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment may generate material that helps researchers organise the evidence and identify broad themes.

> To contact, screen, recruit and schedule participants.
> To organise, facilitate, record and transcribe the focus group.
> To organise the research material and analyse themes, experiences, lessons and differences between groups, including through Teams meeting notes and GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment, with all outputs checked and interpreted by researchers.
> To link findings with other evaluation evidence where appropriate.
> To conduct quality assurance and respond to questions, complaints or withdrawal requests.
> To prepare anonymised findings, which may be presented in aggregated form.

Controller, processors and lawful basis

DESNZ is the data controller for the personal data processed specifically for this evaluation. Fortia Insight processes personal data on behalf of DESNZ under the evaluation contract. GC Insight is Fortia Insight's sub-processor and is responsible for recruitment and delivery of the focus groups.

DESNZ and Triple Point are joint controllers for personal data held and processed as part of the wider administration and delivery of the GHNF scheme. You can see the scheme privacy notice here: Green Heat Network Fund: privacy notice - GOV.UK,

Triple Point's role in relation to this research is to facilitate the provision of sampling information from relevant heat network operators. Triple Point will not receive identifiable focus group recordings, transcripts or research findings.

The lawful basis for processing personal data for this evaluation, including recording and transcribing the focus groups, is **public task**. This is because the research supports the evaluation of a government-funded programme in the public interest. Participation in the research is voluntary. Because recording and transcription are necessary to conduct and analyse these focus groups, anyone who does not wish to be recorded or transcribed can choose not to take part.

Who may receive or access the data?

GC Insight: authorised staff may access recruitment details, recordings, transcripts, Teams meeting notes, research notes and material generated in GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment where needed.

Fortia Insight/RSK Group: anonymised data may be shared where necessary for contract management, coordination or delivery. It will not receive participants' names, contact details, recordings or identifiable transcripts.

DESNZ and Triple Point (the GHNF delivery partner): findings will be anonymised. They will not receive participants' names, contact details, recordings or identifiable transcripts.

Approved providers: necessary Microsoft 365, Teams, Copilot, IT, recording, transcription, hosting, backup or recovery services may process data under security and contractual controls.

Authorities and advisers: auditors, insurers, regulators or competent authorities where required.

GC Insight will handle your information confidentially. Reports will not identify you by name. Any quotations used in reporting will be anonymised and used only where the research team considers that they will not identify you, including when combined with other information. Additional care will be taken for small groups and distinctive circumstances.

Storage, security and location

Recruitment data may be transferred through SharePoint or password-protected files. Data will be stored in restricted-access approved Microsoft 365 and SharePoint locations. Focus groups may be held, recorded and transcribed through Teams, and GC Insight's approved Microsoft 365 Copilot environment may be used to organise the research material and identify broad themes. Access will be restricted to authorised project staff. Security measures include access controls, secure transfers, restricted project folders, approved systems and secure deletion.

Data will be processed in the United Kingdom or the European Economic Area. No transfer outside the European Economic Area is planned. Appropriate safeguards will be established before any future transfers.

Anonymisation and retention

Direct identifiers will be separated or replaced with a participant code at the earliest appropriate point. Identifiable data may remain while recruitment, attendance, quality checks or analysis require it. Outputs shared with DESNZ, Fortia Insight/RSK Group or other partners will be anonymised.

Personal data will be removed from research platforms at the earliest opportunity and retained for no longer than six months after project completion. Completion is currently expected in March 2027, so deletion is expected by approximately September 2027. Recordings may be deleted earlier after an accurate transcript, or analysis record is produced. Anonymised findings may be retained for reporting, audit and learning.

Your rights and contacts

Depending on the circumstances, you may ask for access, correction, deletion or restriction, or object to certain processing. You can ask us to give you a copy of your personal data, correct inaccurate information, restrict or stop certain uses, or delete information where the law gives you that right. Some rights only apply in particular circumstances. If we cannot comply fully with a request, we will explain why. You may also withdraw from the research at any time, although information that has already been anonymised and combined may no longer be removable. Where any processing is specifically based on consent, you may withdraw that consent without affecting earlier lawful processing. If you would like further information about how your personal data is being used, wish to update or remove your details from this evaluation, or would like to make a complaint about how your information is being stored or processed, please contact GC Insight using the contact details provided below:

For privacy queries, withdrawal requests or complaints, contact GC Insight: Lee House, 90 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester, M1 5JW; 0161 528 1660; **dataprotection@gcinsight.co.uk**.

DESNZ Data Protection Officer: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 3–8 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2EG; **dataprotection@energysecurity.gov.uk**.

Right to complain to the ICO: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF; 0303 123 1113; ico.org.uk.

Organisation details

Fortia Insight: Spring Lodge, 172 Chester Road, Helsby, Cheshire, WA6 0AR; 01928 726006; polly.jackson@fortiainsight.com; company number 02937576; ICO registration ZC079046.

GC Insight: Lee House, 90 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester, M1 5JW; 0161 528 1660; enquiries@gcinsight.co.uk; company number 3162288; ICO registration ZB696723.

Applicable standards

We follow the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.