Sureserve

Collaborating on Green Skills:

A framework to increase capacity in retrofit for social housing

September 2025

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Foreword

The scale of the green skills challenge is significant. However ambitious our goals and however well-funded programmes become, we will only deliver safe, healthy and low-carbon homes with a skilled workforce – and building that workforce takes time.

Across the sector, there is strong commitment and a shared understanding that retrofit is essential. Progress is being made, but efforts need to be better connected and funding more consistent.

Too often, access to training depends on geography rather than a clear national plan. With the right coordination, we can change that and create the skills base needed for the future.

As housing professionals, we know that climate change and fuel poverty do not affect all communities equally. It is those living in the least energy-efficient homes – often in the most deprived urban areas – who face the greatest risks. The solutions must be local and inclusive, and we must do more to employ, train and retain talent from within the communities we serve.

We also need to overhaul the perception of careers in construction and retrofit. There's a much wider range of skilled, creative and flexible roles than many realise, from surveyors and coordinators to engineers and data analysts. These are often expert roles, with a strong social and ecological mission at their core.

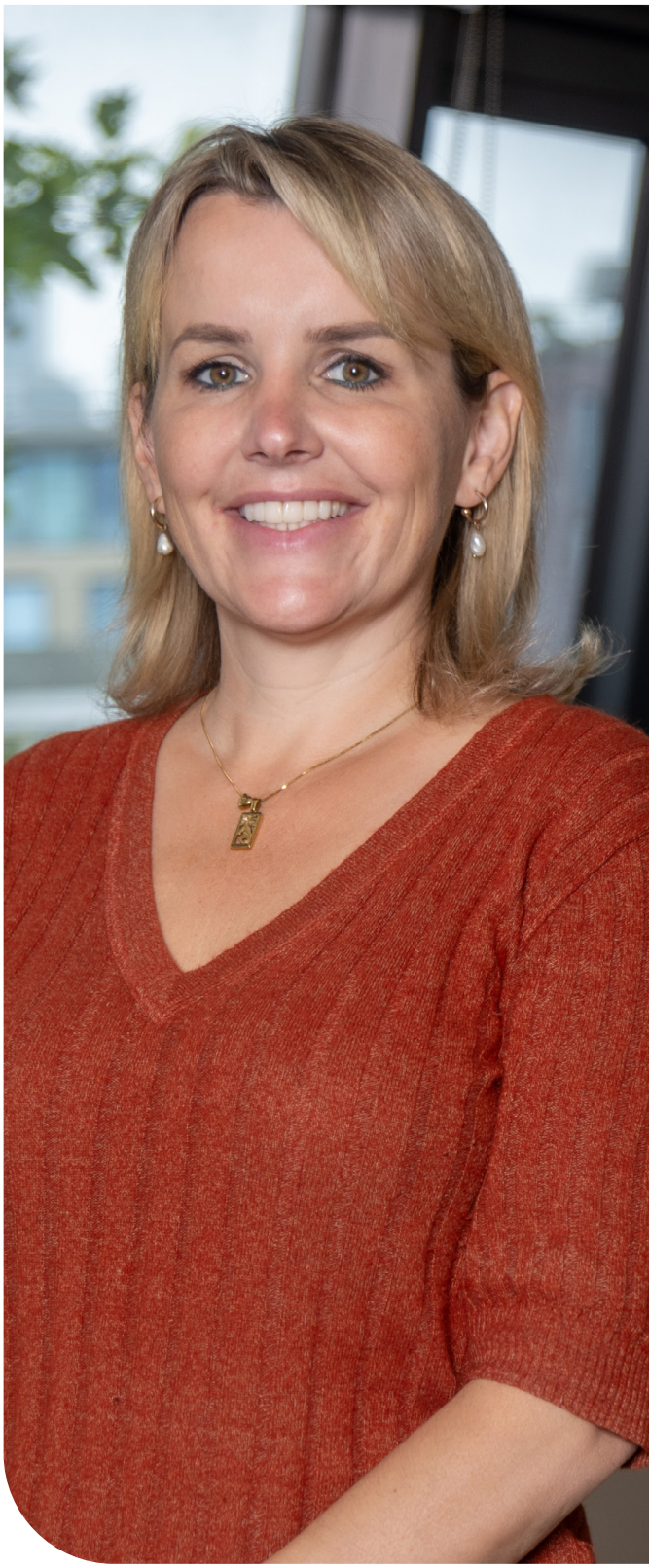
At Peabody, we've seen how apprenticeships and early career engagement can spark real enthusiasm for housing. If we invest in a diverse, local workforce, we support not just net zero targets, but foster inclusive economic growth, community resilience and social mobility.

This report not only further endorses the case for a coordinated national retrofit skills strategy to enable this but also outlines practical steps to unlock truly collaborative working.

I support Sureserve's call for joined-up thinking and strategic leadership. Let's work together to close the green skills gap and, in doing so, build a more sustainable, equitable future for everyone.

By:

Elly Hoult,
Chief Operating Officer / Deputy Chief Executive of Peabody.
President of the Chartered Institute of Housing and Champion of the CHOOSE HOUSING Campaign



Executive Summary

The social housing sector's targets for retrofit require material changes in our workforce, with estimates of 500,000 new entrants needed by 2030.[1] The wider construction industry needs further capacity. Across the industry, skills shortages are cited as a cause of delay, price inflation and low-quality delivery – leading to poor health outcomes for residents and millions in remediation costs.

Action is a matter of both conscience and compliance. Poorly performing homes are colder and more expensive to heat. They drive poverty, damp and mould, and associated ill-health. Awaab's Law, decent homes and tightening energy standards add regulatory and legal compliance pressures on social landlords.

There is opportunity here to deliver better outcomes while also supporting economic growth, productivity and employment. With the introduction of the Procurement Act in February 2025 came the legal obligation for contracting authorities to 'maximise public benefit' by considering the broader societal, economic, and environmental impact of their procurement decisions. This means actively looking for ways to improve community well-being through initiatives like local job creation and reduced carbon emissions.

Sureserve is already working hard on these issues – skills shortages are a significant risk for our business and our clients. We invest heavily in apprenticeships, training and reskilling our workforce.

But we face the same challenges as the rest of the sector. Our workforce is ageing; we need to develop the skills and capacity required, but policy uncertainty and systemic issues make this challenging. These are shared challenges, and they are important.

This report presents our priority policies that we believe can address these pressing issues. We are also developing the Sureserve Healthy Homes and Retrofit Model – a framework for collaboration which reflects our commitment to supporting the sector's goals of tackling fuel poverty and improving health outcomes, while decarbonising social homes.

By publishing this report, we hope to highlight the most relevant issues and invite collaboration to help address the green skills gap. We'd like to work together with stakeholders across the industry, from clients to training providers and government.

Untapped potential

The 'green skills' opportunity is considerable. The housing industry invests billions each year in the maintenance and upgrade of existing homes and needs an army of people to meet this demand.

But the retrofit transition must not become a gateway for unqualified firms to enter the market unchecked. Instead, it is an opportunity to retrain existing engineers and attract new entrants into high-quality, purpose-driven careers.

Drawing on a meta-analysis of more than 35 green skills reports published over 10 years and supported by Sureserve's on-the-ground experience, this report acknowledges the systemic barriers to progress.

An ageing workforce, unclear career pathways, outdated qualifications, and inconsistent training provision have stalled growth in the retrofit skills base. The fragmented policy and funding environment limits employer confidence to invest in training. These challenges are compounded by a lack of standardisation, insufficient teaching capacity, and low diversity in the workforce.

While the PAS 2035 framework introduces quality-assured roles like retrofit assessor and coordinator, the infrastructure to train and accredit professionals at scale remains underdeveloped.

The skills gap is a national challenge, but also a national opportunity. With the right policies and partnerships, the UK can build a resilient, capable workforce that meets our climate, housing and economic goals.

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[1] Greening our Existing Homes: National Retrofit Strategy V2 – CLC, June 2021

One big ask

We recognise the fact that there is already an extensive range of policy asks of government.

We are pleased to see the latest commitment by the government to help SMEs access skilled staff to make the most of new opportunities in the retrofit and energy efficiency sectors.

This includes the training of up to 18,000 skilled workers to install heat pumps, fit solar panels, install insulation and work on heat networks through the extension of the Heat Training Grant and launch of the Warm Homes Skills Programme in England. [2]

But one request stands out: the need for all these activities to come together within a comprehensive supply chain and skills strategy.

In its submission to the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee in 2023,[3] the G15 – representing London's largest housing associations – called for just this sort of strategy. So have the Gatsby Foundation[4] and the National Retrofit Hub, the latter directly presenting policy recommendations for a national retrofit workforce strategy.[5]

Our view is that such a strategy should be supported by the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, Skills England and equivalents within devolved nations, with coordinated funding, clear standards, regional access, and meaningful pathways for both new and transitioning workers.

There are five additional elements to this which we believe could have the most impact on our clients, on the social housing sector overall, and on the supply chain:

1. **The phased introduction of mandatory qualifications for those working to achieve healthy, lower-carbon homes, backed up by stronger accreditation pathways.**
2. **Promotion of the vital role of local technical colleges and training hubs working in close partnership with employers, gradually adjusting funding for apprenticeships to focus on green skills and related occupations.**
3. **Encouraging existing workers in housing, compliance and construction to embrace mid-career retraining, using the current refresher points which are both expected and understood.**
4. **Promoting rewarding careers to a more diverse workforce, with greater regional support and ease of access.**
5. **A policy environment and cultural shift which encourages employers to treat training like R&D.**

There are further details on each of these recommendations on pages 10 to 11.

Sureserve Healthy Homes and Retrofit Model

Alongside these recommendations, we have outlined a new framework for collaboration between registered social landlords, training providers, local communities, contractors and key strategic suppliers like Sureserve.

You can find more information on the Sureserve Healthy Homes and Retrofit Model on page 16. The main elements include:

1. **Community-based recruitment and inclusion**
2. **Embedded local employment and mentorship**
3. **Local training, qualifications and CPD**
4. **Partnerships and social value integration**
5. **Sustainable funding and career pathways**

Now we need you

Sureserve is taking a leadership role: investing in apprenticeships, training dual-fuel engineers, partnering with local colleges, and launching new models such as a solar PV apprenticeship in Scotland.

We are advocating for a collaborative approach, treating training as an investment akin to R&D, and ensuring that residents benefit from safe, compliant and effective retrofit.

By publishing this report, we want to get key figures within social housing and government talking about how we can achieve this together.

Contact us at SSG.Marketing@sureserve.co.uk for details of our regional events and roundtable discussions with policymakers across the UK, and tell us how best Sureserve can support your own efforts to increase capacity and capability in social housing retrofit.

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2. Backing Your Business: Our Plan for Small and Medium Sized Businesses – Department for Business & Trade, July 2025
3. Heating our homes – The G15, August 2023
4. Ready for Retrofit? An Analysis of Local Skills Improvement Plans in England – Charlotte Ravenscroft, June 2024
5. Policy Recommendations for a National Retrofit Workforce Strategy – National Retrofit Hub, June 2025

The challenge we face

It's often repeated that the UK's homes are some of the oldest, most unhealthy and least energy efficient in Western Europe.

Energy used in UK homes made up **26%** of final UK energy consumption in 2023 and caused **24%** of UK CO2 emissions in 2022.[6]

Yet, according to an international survey in 2020, British homes leak all that heat up to three times more quickly than more energy-efficient homes on the continent.[7] We pay more to keep our homes free of cold, damp and mould, and face the risk of serious physical and mental health problems when we can't afford to do that.

The cost to the NHS of health conditions linked to damp and mould, excess cold and other hazards faced by people living in poor housing, was quantified decades ago, at well over a billion pounds a year.[8] It's a completely unnecessary level of detriment.

Recent studies have confirmed that improving the energy efficiency of homes in England, while also accelerating the switch to electric kitchen and heating systems, could improve the health of millions and bring almost £1.4bn of savings for NHS England by 2050.[9]

So it is essential to improve our existing building stock if we are to tackle climate change, build national energy security, and create stronger, healthier communities.

An integrated approach is needed

But this isn't just a question of health or carbon. It's also about legal compliance, resident safety, and long-term resilience. This is where we need to understand the wider benefits of retrofit within the housing sector.

Housing can be a very siloed industry and there's a huge amount of missed opportunity by looking at retrofit as a separate issue to day-to-day repairs and asset management.

Retrofit is too often seen as 'too difficult' or a 'nice to have' (when grant funding is available), and not the solution to wider problems like damp and mould, fuel poverty, broader asset management and repairs, or even community issues like anti-social behaviour.

This is going to have to change, especially as the regulatory landscape becomes more complex for social landlords.

For example, at the time of writing, the Government is consulting on the new Decent Homes Standard and a more stringent EPC C standard for Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in social rented homes in England by 2030.

In October 2025, the first phase of Awaab's Law also comes into force, demanding social landlords take urgent action to tackle housing hazards such as damp and mould.

These are just two areas of fast-moving policy development raising the bar on compliance, with clear legal and regulatory consequences for inaction. Housing providers must be able to demonstrate that the work being done is timely, compliant, safe and high quality.

UK homes made up:

26% Final Energy Consumption **2023**

24% Total UK CO_2 Emissions **2022**

6. Energy efficiency of UK homes – House of Commons Library, February 2025
7. Draughty British homes lose heat more quickly than those in Europe – Madeleine Cuff, The i Paper, February 2020
8. The cost of poor housing to the NHS – BRE, 2015
9. Health impacts on net-zero housing in England – DESNZ, March 2025

The skills gap

In 2024, our Delivering Warm Homes report[10] highlighted headline challenges and solutions to this agenda. High among these issues is the skills gap, a problem that has been highlighted by numerous reports including important contributions by the London Homes Coalition and National Retrofit Hub.

Simply put, we don't have the workforce in place to deliver the sector's goals on retrofit. This includes a shortage of workers equipped with the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to support the transition to healthier, lower-carbon living.

For housing, this transition involves constructing energy-efficient homes and retrofitting existing homes to improve energy efficiency, installing renewable energy and storage and moving away from fossil fuelled heating. It also requires an understanding of issues such as ventilation and indoor air quality, and skills relating to fire safety, accessibility, electrical safety and compliance.

The range of skilled roles required for this transition includes dual-fuel heating engineers, surveyors, retrofit assessors, retrofit coordinators, insulation installers, window and door fitters, solar PV and electric battery installers, heat pump installers, and many more.

We also need people skilled in maintenance for new systems and in repairing building components. And supporting the transition will also require administrative staff, project managers, data analysts, funding bid writers, communications experts, resident engagement specialists, and others.

We clearly need a workforce that is properly trained, accredited and capable of delivering retrofit to a consistent and verifiable standard. The demand for skilled retrofit operatives and clean heat installers has never been more pressing.

It also needs to be a long-term, adaptable workforce – people with the technical skills, soft skills and flexibility to navigate evolving standards, shifting funding models and new technologies. In an uncertain political climate, where priorities and programmes can change with little notice, our workforce strategy must be built on versatility.

Skills within social housing providers also need to increase, to make sure they are informed clients, skilled contract managers, and can hold their supply chain to account when things go wrong.

[10] Delivering Warm Homes – Sureserve, November 2024

A chronic and connected challenge

Retrofit skills are often discussed in isolation – as if they're a new thing we're dealing with – but the challenges are systemic and deeply rooted across the construction industry.

In **'Rethinking Construction'**, published in 1998, Sir John Egan identified a crisis in training:

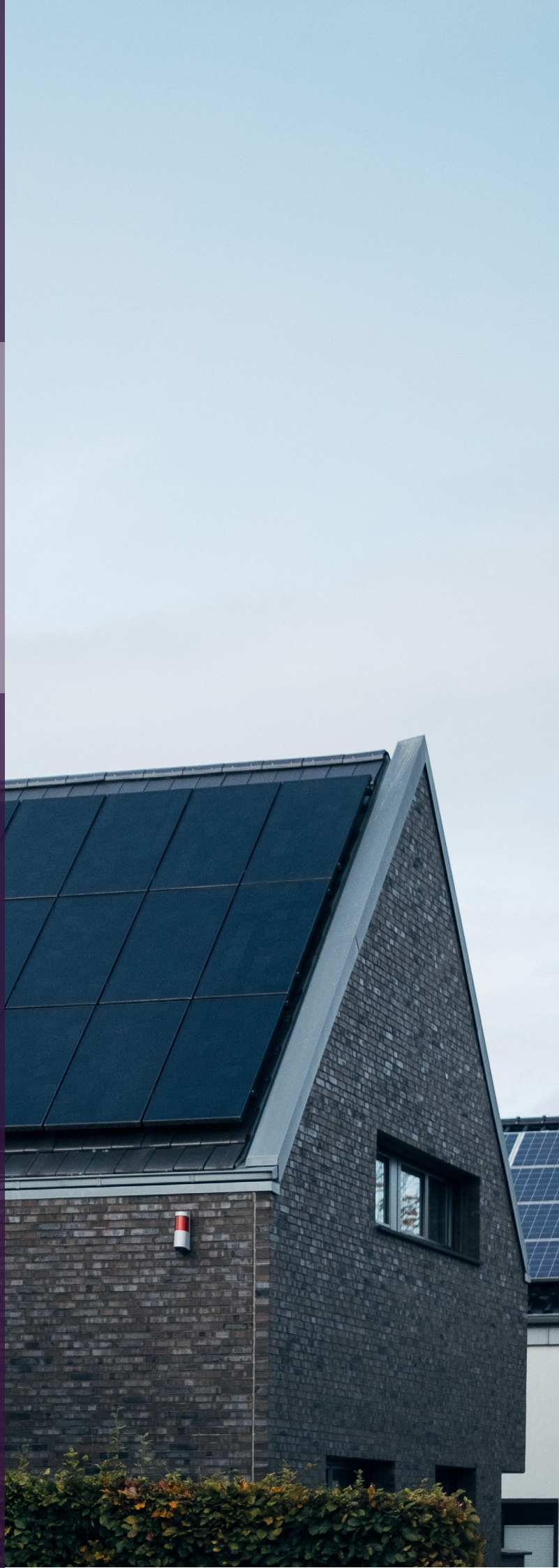
"The proportion of trainees in the workforce appears to have declined by half since the 1970s and there is increasing concern about skill shortages in the industry. Too few people are being trained to replace the ageing skilled workforce, and too few are acquiring the technical and managerial skills required to get full value from new techniques and technologies. Construction also lacks a proper career structure to develop supervisory and management grades..."

Much has changed since 1998, but the underlying skills gaps and workforce dynamics remain. Market uncertainty, along with short-term funding and contracting practices, dents market confidence and provides little incentive for industry to upskill or for training providers to invest in courses and facilities.

Social housing retrofit, with its close ties to ongoing asset management – including maintenance, compliance and cyclical investment – offers an opportunity to boost longer-term workforce capacity and skills.

In our analysis of more than 35 previous reports, several common problems and concerns are identified about how we are going to achieve an adequately large, trained, qualified and accredited workforce for domestic retrofit and safety compliance in the UK.

There are knotty, interwoven challenges across government policy, industry practices, workforce characteristics and the education system. Addressing them will clearly require a holistic and long-term coordinated approach.



One big ask

There is widespread agreement across the sector on the systemic challenges limiting the growth of green skills in retrofit. Some have particular implications for national contractors like Sureserve. For example:

- **The lack of a central, coordinated training framework makes it difficult to plan workforce development across regions.**
- **Short-term funding, unclear standards, and inconsistent accreditation weaken both training provision and public trust.**
- **Financial barriers deter both individuals and SMEs from investing in training, while colleges lack the support and confidence to scale up provision.**
- **Workforce challenges are acute. A significant proportion of skilled workers are nearing retirement, yet entry routes for new talent and retraining pathways for existing workers remain unclear and underused. Regional disparities in access to training further compound the issue.**
- **Too often, training is theoretical, outdated or misaligned with the needs of retrofit delivery. Meanwhile, awareness of retrofit careers is low among the public and employers alike.**

Sureserve has previously provided evidence to government in response to its readiness to better consider green skills.

We believe it is important for the government to properly and regularly evaluate the size and suitability of the retrofit workforce to ensure that its ambitious targets can be met and that households are receiving high-quality and effective retrofit measures. This includes removing any barriers to attracting new people into the industry and ensuring there are clear and accessible training and accreditation pathways for the workforce.

We have welcomed the creation of the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to ensure the success of the Clean Energy Mission and deliver this government's ambitions. We see a key opportunity for the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to play a coordinating role, bringing together the complex ecosystem of government departments, accreditors, industry and training providers to create a more cohesive offer for the current and future workforce. In housing, this must link into wider construction skills policy for maintenance and new build.

Sureserve supports the need for comprehensive and rigorous training for those delivering retrofit, but the government's targets need to recognise the potential lag in scaling up the workforce and the impact this may have on short-term delivery. These challenges create particular delivery risks for national businesses operating across multiple geographies.

We fully support the National Retrofit Hub's policy recommendations for a National Retrofit Workforce Strategy.[11] Developed by the Hub's Workforce Growth and Skills Development Working Group, in collaboration with Ashden and Polln, the recommendations offer a bold but achievable plan: a 10-year National Retrofit Workforce Strategy, bringing together government, industry, training providers and local leaders to create the conditions for success.

We also believe the following five additional actions would have the greatest impact in supporting such a strategy:

[11] Policy Recommendations for a National Retrofit Workforce Strategy – National Retrofit Hub, June 2025

[12] Qualifications & Training Map – National Retrofit Hub, February 2024

We also believe the following five additional actions would have the greatest impact in supporting such a strategy:

1. Mandatory qualifications and stronger accreditation pathway

A phased-in, national, mandatory, high-quality qualification framework is urgently needed to ensure consistency, make evident the career pathways available for the future, to build public trust, and eliminate poor-quality practice.

We would also encourage the use of the National Retrofit Hub's Qualifications and Training Map,[12] a directory that links to qualifications relevant for retrofit.

But qualifications on their own don't do the job, and training to achieve a qualification is not going to be enough for retrofit professionals, particularly those with a lack of prior experience. The current patchwork of voluntary standards and inconsistent certification routes also undermines the credibility of retrofit delivery.

So we also want to see clear, enforceable accreditation pathways – akin to the Gas Safe model – which would improve consumer confidence, protect public investment, and enable training providers and employers to align provision with recognised career routes.

2. Promotion of the vital role of local technical colleges, and green apprenticeships

Further education colleges must be placed at the heart of local retrofit skills delivery. This requires stable investment, support to modernise facilities and recruit more tutors, and greater flexibility in funding models to reflect the small cohorts and specialist nature of green skills training.

Apprenticeship funding should also be tailored to support green skills and retrofit pathways, with streamlined routes for both new entrants and upskilling professionals. Empowering local colleges and other training hubs in this way would expand regional capacity and provide accessible, high-quality training close to where it is most needed.

3. Encouraging mid-career retraining and existing refresher points

The workforce of the future will depend largely on today's workers. Thousands of skilled professionals, particularly in gas and heating, are open to retraining – but lack clear pathways, financial support, and consistent signals from government and employers.

Building on existing refresher schemes (such as Gas Safe renewals) and embedding low-carbon modules into familiar processes would help mainstream upskilling with minimal disruption, while reducing cost and confusion for learners.

4. Promoting great careers to a more diverse workforce

With a third of the workforce aged over 45 and persistent underrepresentation of women and minority groups, attracting new entrants is essential.

National and local government must work with industry to improve the visibility and appeal of green careers, especially in disadvantaged areas where retrofit can drive both economic and social value. Regional disparities in training access must also be addressed through targeted investment and inclusive recruitment strategies, ensuring the retrofit sector reflects the communities it serves.

Housing providers can also help build local skills by promoting apprenticeships and other skilled trades roles within their contractors to their residents.

5. Treating training like R&D

Workforce development should be approached with the same attitude, ambition and long-term commitment as research and development.

This means providing stable, multi-year funding for skills, encouraging experimentation through pilot programmes, and embedding learning into long-term delivery planning.

By treating training as an investment – not a short-term cost – government and industry can foster a culture of continuous improvement, support innovation, and futureproof the workforce for the scale and pace of the transition ahead.

What would an R&D approach to green skills look like?

Longer-term funding models

- Funding streams of five to 10 years to reduce short-termism and allow local authorities, social landlords and employers to plan effectively.
- Incentivised employers to co-invest in long-term skills R&D with colleges and universities, sharing risks and rewards through matched funding or tax incentives.
- Funded regional demonstration projects that integrate skills training, technology pilots, and supply chain development.

Iterative learning

- Support for experimentation, pilots and iterative feedback rather than one-off training programmes.
- A Green Skills R&D Fund to support collaborative projects between employers and FE colleges to prototype and refine training content.
- Skills pathways that evolve alongside emerging technologies and policy shifts.
- Annual Green Skills Innovation Reports published to share lessons learned, scale best practice, and inform policymakers and industry.
- Map local retrofit requirements and overlay data on available skills provision (number of installers, training routes, etc.) to identify regional gaps.

Collaboration

- Innovation and delivery partnerships between local government and social landlords, employers and service providers like Sureserve, training providers, and technology developers.
- Use of the National Retrofit Hub Regional Retrofit Skills Taskforce Checklist – developed to assist policy officers, delivery officers, home energy leads or similar positions working within Net Zero Hubs, Combined Authorities, and County Councils to develop a collaborative regional skills taskforce.
- Use of Living Labs in social housing estates to trial new retrofit technologies and installation techniques, collecting real-world performance data.
- Place-based retrofit skills clusters, bringing together local authorities, social landlords, SMEs, training providers, and technology developers.

Evidence-led programmes

- Integrated data collection and evaluation built into every stage of training and skills deployment, assessing their effectiveness and adapting them continuously based on feedback.
- Skills Passports that record ongoing learning and certification, enabling workers to move fluidly between retrofit, renewables, and other green sectors.
- Modular, stackable credentials that allow workers to add competencies in line with technology advances (e.g. new heat pump models, AI-enabled home energy management).
- Use of Nesta's Open Jobs Observatory to track labour market needs, green job advertisements, skills gaps, and training outcomes in real-time.
- Impact evaluation frameworks to measure not just training outputs but also retrofit quality, carbon savings, resident satisfaction, and local economic impacts.

The Sureserve difference

Sureserve is dedicated to addressing the unique needs of housing associations, local authorities and residents by providing a comprehensive portfolio of high-quality solutions that ensure energy efficiency, safe compliant homes, and improved quality of life.

We have been dedicated to improving energy efficiency, reducing fuel poverty, and lowering emissions in social housing since 1988.

The company differentiates itself through its holistic approach, Nationwide knowledge, regional expertise, and commitment to excellent customer service, all while fostering strong partnerships and maintaining a focus on innovation and sustainability.

We employ more than **4000** people, two thirds of which are fully trained and qualified engineers delivering a range of essential and affordable heating, renewables, energy efficiency and compliance solutions to social housing and the public sector including major local authorities and housing associations across the UK.

Our services include market leading heating and hot water services, gas, electrical and fire compliance, insulation solutions, water and air hygiene, and smart metering. Sureserve cover installations, repairs and maintenance across these services.

Learn more about us
www.sureserve.co.uk

Image: 2025 Sureserve Apprentice Day at Silverstone | 187 Apprentices

Given the complexity of the issues identified, it's clear that no one organisation, industry body or even government department can solve them single-handedly. It requires a truly collaborative approach, which is why we are publishing this report and using it as the basis for policy meetings, regional roundtable discussions and new partnerships.

We have also identified key areas in which Sureserve can make a difference and contribute meaningfully to increasing capacity in green skills and low carbon retrofit.

These include our work in recruitment, retention and reskilling, and our partnerships with social landlords.

Sureserve is committed to investing in apprenticeships across both technical and administrative areas, including electrical, gas, and renewable technology.

Sureserve is investing heavily in attracting and training new talent. We are utilising 92% of the Apprenticeship Levy and 4% of our workforce are on an apprenticeship scheme.

We are also encouraging other organisations, both from within social housing and the retrofit supply chain, to maximise their use of apprentices, using our apprenticeship programme as a model for others.

Social housing retrofit presents an excellent opportunity for employment from underrepresented groups, including people from the same communities that the sector is serving. We are actively seeking out more diverse approaches to recruitment into the sector, to attract young people entering the workforce looking for future-proof skilled employment that contributes to the climate agenda.

We have an engaged workforce and can bring the apprentice voice into any discussions around green skills.

And by improving the equality, diversity and inclusion of our teams – and ensuring that the workforce reflects the communities we serve – we hope to help reach more households that require retrofit and safety interventions.

Sureserve's Apprenticeships play a pivotal role in training the next generation of engineers, ensuring a pipeline of talent to support the retrofit and clean energy transition.

This provides a range of practical, technical, accredited, and professional development opportunities for apprentices, new recruits, and current employees, ensuring we are delivering at the highest level for our clients and social housing residents.

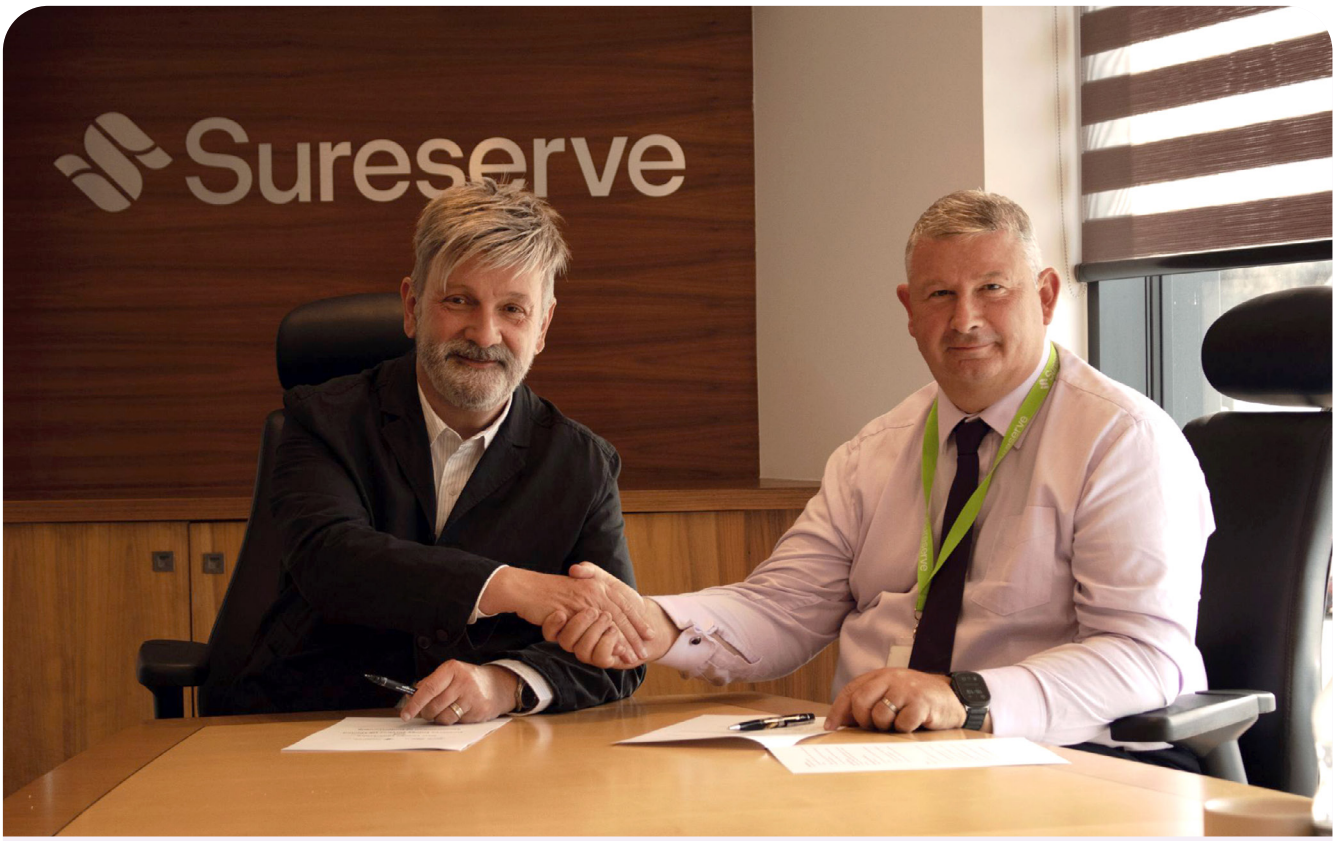
We are investing in getting our engineers 'dual fuel' trained, ensuring engineers are technically competent in both gas and heat pumps to address the growing demand for low-carbon heating systems and providing them with flexibility and a green career path.

Sureserve is also committed to working in partnership with social landlords, ensuring their needs are fully understood by funding bodies and policymakers.

Proud to work in partnership with:

Association of **Apprentices**

Case Studies



Building the green workforce of the future: Sureserve Energy Services and New College Lanarkshire launch bespoke solar apprenticeship

In partnership with North Lanarkshire Council and New College Lanarkshire, Sureserve Energy Services is launching a bespoke solar PV apprenticeship that combines roofing and electrical skills into a single qualification.

The programme aims to address the green skills gap, boost local employment, and support the council's decarbonisation targets as part of a five-year solar and battery installation contract for Scotland's largest council-owned housing portfolio.

Recruitment will focus on individuals furthest from the labour market via the employability charity Routes to Work, with access to local funding to ensure inclusivity.

Initially, electrical apprentices will complete solar-specific and roofing training modules, with a formal SVQ/NVQ pathway to follow. The partnership also includes career development opportunities for existing Sureserve staff, including degree-level leadership programmes. The model is designed to be scalable nationwide and aims to deliver lasting social value in public procurement.

David Black, Head of Operations at Sureserve Energy Services, says the initiative is rooted in a clear ethos:

"We're not interested in ticking boxes. This is about giving people a real career path.

If someone comes in as an apprentice and wants to stay in solar, great. If they want to move into another part of the business – whether that be electrical compliance, retrofit coordination, or management – we'll support them. Our job is to create those pathways and make sure they're attainable."

Building a renewable-ready workforce at Sureserve

As we support the transition to low-carbon heating, it's vital to invest in the next generation of engineers. Sureserve Compliance Central's renewable energy department has grown from two installers in 2015 to over 100 specialist renewable engineers, including 24 apprentices.

Led by Aaron Petts, the department combines structured apprenticeships with in-house training to prepare engineers for the complexity of modern low-carbon energy systems.

"Around a quarter of the team are apprentices, which reflects our strong belief in investing in talent from the ground up," Aaron says. "We are helping individuals to develop the right skills, values, and approach that align with the company's high standards.

While experience is valuable, we place equal importance on enthusiasm, dedication, and a willingness to learn – qualities that allow apprentices to grow into highly skilled professionals."

Apprentices typically follow a Level 3 Plumbing and Heating pathway, with a third-year option to specialise in gas or renewables, though provision for the renewables route remains limited across the UK.

Sureserve collaborates with colleges such as Suffolk College's Net Zero Skills Centre to improve training quality, while also investing heavily in its own facilities to ensure real-world standards.

Recruits, including career changers, are trained across multiple renewable technologies, including heat pumps, Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR), solar PV, solar thermal, and biomass.

"We're not just training heating engineers; we're creating energy specialists who can think holistically about the building and its systems," says Aaron, who sees apprentices as vital to future-proofing the industry.

The future of heating is evolving, as renewable technologies play an ever-greater role," he adds.

"For those looking to build lasting careers in the industry, developing skills in these emerging technologies offers real opportunity and long-term security."

The programme supports national decarbonisation goals, particularly in social housing, and addresses skills shortages. Performance metrics guide ongoing training needs, and Sureserve advocates for stronger collaboration between colleges, manufacturers and employers to future-proof the industry.

Sureserve Healthy Homes and Retrofit Model

We are fast developing the Sureserve Healthy Homes and Retrofit Model – a local delivery framework for working in partnership with our social housing clients to build both capacity and capability in safe, healthy and lower carbon retrofit. We welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you.

This model outlines a structured approach to working in partnership to build and sustain a local retrofit workforce.

It is designed to deliver high-quality outcomes for social housing clients and customers, while also addressing wider green skills challenges such as recruitment, retention, and accreditation.

The model is built on five core pillars:

1. Community-based recruitment and inclusion

- Diverse recruitment routes to attract new entrants, including from specific communities and local residents, and including targeted campaigns for career changers.
- Assessment centres and inclusive practices aim to improve recruitment rates among underrepresented groups.

2. Embedded local employment and mentorship

- Sureserve acts as a direct employer, offering full-time contracts with attractive salaries to retrofit professionals who are then embedded into local authority or housing association teams. After the secondment, these employees may be offered pathways to remain in Sureserve or become future trainers.
- Employees receive structured mentoring from experienced Sureserve engineers and tailored support for career progression.

3. Local training, qualifications and CPD

- 'Train the Trainer' courses and pop-up academies are delivered in partnership between Sureserve, social landlords, local authorities, local colleges and training providers.
- Qualifications include modules on health awareness and safeguarding, supporting holistic delivery.
- A strong focus on competence-specific learning and practical CPD, supported by accreditation, candidate tracking, and performance monitoring for quality assurance.
- 'Living labs' on housing estates provide real-world training environments.

4. Partnerships and social value integration

- The model could incorporate partnerships with health providers, job access charities and other local organisations to improve wraparound support.
- All activity is aligned with the social housing provider's social value strategy and measured against pre-agreed objectives embedded into contracts. These would be unique to each project but could focus on the number of apprentices trained, retrofit projects completed, carbon savings, or diversity improvements.

5. Sustainable funding and career pathways

- Pooled funding sources include Apprenticeship Levy contributions and regional skills grants.
- Career progression is supported through defined pathways, mentoring, and future training opportunities.
- A communications strategy underpins the entire model, ensuring visibility of outcomes and clarity for stakeholders.

How many workers do we need?

120-230,000

New jobs could be created in the buildings, construction and retrofit sector by 2030.[1]

500,000

Total workers needed in specific retrofit-related roles across the UK by the year 2030.[2]

15,000

Retrofit Assessors.[3]

50,000

Retrofit Coordinators.[2]

105,000

Energy Efficiency Installers.[3]

50,200

Heat Pump Installers.[4]

>13,500

Insulation Specilists.[5]

>37,500

Heating Engineers / Plumbers.[5]

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1. A Net Zero workforce – Climate Change Committee, May 2023
2. Greening our Existing Homes: National Retrofit Strategy V2 – CLC, June 2021
3. Heat and Buildings Strategy – Department for Business & Trade, October 2021
4. Green jobs: rapid evidence review – Nesta, March 2023
5. Green skills as an enabler of UK retrofit – PWC, November 2022

Help us develop this model

We are holding a series of regional roundtable events throughout the rest of this year, and would value your contribution to the discussion and any new ideas on how to develop this model.

If you're interested to know more, contact us via:
SSG.Marketing@sureserve.co.uk

Appendix – Further reading

1. Health and Wellbeing in Homes – Published by the UK Green Building Council, July 2016
2. Modernise or Die: Time to decide the industry's future – The Farmer Review of the UK Construction Labour Model, published by the Construction Leadership Council and Cast Consultancy, October 2016
3. GCB Buildings Energy Taskgroup summary of recommendations for existing buildings in response to 2030 'mission' – Published May 2020
4. National Retrofit Strategy V2 – Published by the Construction Leadership Council, June 2021
5. Green Jobs Taskforce Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector – Published July 2021
6. HM Government Heat and Buildings Strategy – Published October 2021
7. Perspective and pathways – Published by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), November 2021
8. A blueprint for green workforce transformation – Published by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and Deloitte, April 2022
9. What next for Heat and Buildings Policy? – Published by the Sustainable Energy Association (SEA), June 2022
10. Driving construction skills, growth, and jobs through Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) – Published by the CITB and the Construction Leadership Council (CLC), November 2022
11. Greening the UK's Skills – Published by NOCN Group and the British Association of Construction Heads (BACH), November 2022
12. South West Net Zero Hub Retrofit Skills Report – Published by Gemserv, April 2023
13. Bright Futures: Decarbonising the UK's energy workforce – Published by City & Guilds, Engineering UK and Lightcast, July 2023
14. Heating Our Homes (G15 submission to the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee) – Published by the G15, August 2023
15. Green skills in education and employment – Published by UK Parliament POST, January 2024
16. Regional Retrofit Skills Taskforce Checklist – Published by the National Retrofit Hub, April 2024
17. Roadmap of skills for net zero: Competencies for domestic retrofit – Published by the CLC, May 2024
18. Green skills for UK Local Authorities: The journey to Net Zero – Published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), May 2024
19. Ready for retrofit? An analysis of local skills improvement plans in England: A report to the Gatsby Foundation – Published by Charlotte Ravenscroft, June 2024
20. Building Skills for the Future – Published by the London Homes Coalition, July 2024
21. Delivering Warm Homes: the plan for a Labour Government – Published by Sureserve and Global Counsel, September 2024
22. Improving the energy efficiency of Britain's homes: the opportunity – Published by the CITB and TrustMark, October 2024
23. Making Performance-Led Home Retrofit a Reality – Published by MIMA, February 2025
24. Closing the retrofit skills gap - Published by the National Retrofit Hub, Ashden and Gatsby Foundation, March 2025
25. What is the green skills gap (and why does it matter)? – Published by the University of the Built Environment (formerly UCEM), March 2025
26. Skilled to Build – Empowering the UK's Repair, Maintenance and Improvement sector for a better future – Published by TrustMark, March 2025
27. Health impacts of net-zero housing in England – Published by Climate Services for a Net Zero Resilient World (CS-N0W), March 2025
28. Retrofitting homes for net zero – Published by the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, May 2025

29. Establishing a 'Green and Decent' Homes Programme – Published by Southwark Council, May 2025

30. Domestic Energy Efficiency Retrofit Supply Chain Final Report – Published by DESNZ, May 2025

31. Domestic Energy Efficiency Retrofit Supply Chain Technical Annex – Published by DESNZ, May 2025

32. Industry Competence Committee annual report 2024 to 2025 – Published by the ICC, May 2025

33. Skills England: Sector evidence on the growth and skills offer – Published by the Department for Education, June 2025

34. Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments Clean Energy Industries – Published by the Department for Education, June 2025

35. Skills England: Sector skills needs assessments Construction – Published by the Department for Education, June 2025

36. The Construction Workforce Outlook: the United Kingdom Labour Market Intelligence Report 2025-2029 – Published by the CITB, June 2025

37. Policy Recommendations for a National Retrofit Workforce Strategy – Published by the National Retrofit Hub, June 2025

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This report was produced in partnership with **Liz Male Consulting** and **Climate Programme Partners**

Sureserve
Norfolk House, 13 Southampton Place, London, WC1A 2AJ
www.sureserve.co.uk