

**Climate
Citizens**



Lancaster
Environment Centre



**Thinking beyond the consumer:
What if we called them people?**

Who said this?

“The risk here, for those of us who care about reaching Net Zero – as I do - is simple: If we continue down this path, we risk losing the consent of the British people.

And the resulting backlash would not just be against specific policies but against the wider mission itself, meaning we might never achieve our goal.

That’s why we have to do things differently.”



Context & approach

- Need to engage people in (next stage of) decarbonisation
- How does current governance deal with people?
- Approach:
 - Corpus analysis – NZ Strategy, Ofgem, NAO, NIC
 - Stakeholder interviews – HMG, Ofgem, business, policy analysts

Corpus analysis

For this research, four corpora were created, as below; analysed using SketchEngine software.

Corpus analysis techniques:

- Keyword analysis: comparing the frequency of different words
- Collocation: words which frequently occur alongside the keyword – the ‘atmosphere’ of a word

Energy & Climate Governance Corpus: 190k words

sample of current documents from central government and regulators

- HM Government Net Zero Strategy (117k words; 2021)
- National Audit Office: Achieving Net Zero (20k words; 2020)
- Ofgem: Smart Systems & Flexibility Plan (15k words; 2021)
- Ofgem: Decarbonisation Action Plan (15k words; 2020)
- National Infrastructure Commission: Net Zero Report (20k words; 2020)

Divided into:



Net Zero Strategy: 117k words

Government’s overarching climate change strategy, incorporating all policy sectors



Regulators: 70k words

- Responsible for implementation of policy, including detailed plans for, eg, design of energy markets; planning policy, economic policy, etc
- 3 agencies: Ofgem; NAO; NIC

Budget comparison corpus: 74k words

- HM Treasury Autumn Budget & Spending Review 2021
- As a comparison corpus, this allows the tone & word use of energy & climate governance texts to be compared with other texts written in a similar style

Findings

1. Climate and energy governance language is depersonalized
2. Where people are considered, economic language dominates
3. There is some, limited appeal to people's other roles – eg as citizens, family members or young people

1. Climate and energy governance language is depersonalised

There are far fewer 'people' nouns in ECG documents compared to the Budget

use of 'people' nouns, eg *consumer, household, public, family, youth, farmer*:

Energy & Climate Governance:

- **11** of top 500 nouns are 'people' nouns
- **1.8%** of occurrences of top 500 nouns are 'people' words
- **top 5:** *consumer; community; people; public; household*

Net Zero Strategy

10 of top 500

1.5% of occurrences

top 5: *community, consumer; people; public; society*

Regulators

• **12** of top 500

• **2.4%** of occurrences

• **top 5:** *consumer, people, user, customer, individual*

Budget comparison:

- **23** out of the top 500 nouns are 'people' nouns
- **3.4%** of occurrences of top 500 nouns are 'people' words
- **top 5:** *people; community; public; child; household*

1. Climate and energy governance language is depersonalised

Technical and economic terms are more common

Comparing frequency of nouns across corpora:

Energy & Climate Governance:

- **consumer** = 22nd most used noun; no others in top 100
- **community** = 123rd most used noun
- **more common:** *system, technology, hydrogen, market* (all top 20)

Net Zero Strategy:

- **no 'people' nouns in top 50**
- **community** = 79th
- **consumer** = 85th
- **top 20:** *hydrogen, technology, strategy, fuel, gas, cost*

Regulators:

- **consumer** = 6th most used noun; no others in top 200
- **people** = 202nd
- **top 20:** *market, network, storage, cost, technology*

Budget comparison:

- **people** = 25th
- **community** = 50th
- **public** = 85th

More common: *funding, business, support, growth, debt* (all top 20)

1. Climate and energy governance language is depersonalised

Stakeholders: Not a surprise....

“You could get literally six men, and I’m pretty sure they were all men, in a room, the heads of the Big Six [energy companies] and say ‘right, guys, this is what we’re going to do’”

“policymakers think of these as physical systems that they are changing.... The policy language is more comfortable just talking about the physical thing”

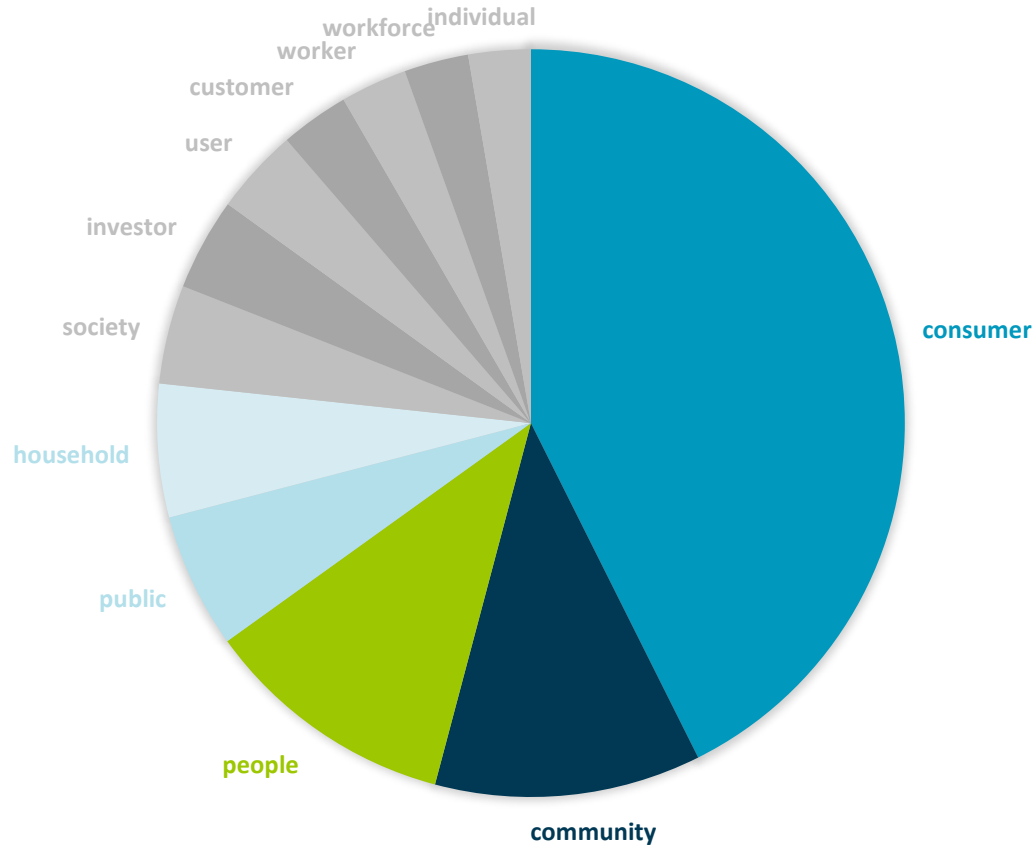
.... But all thought next 30 years will have to be different

2. Economic language dominates

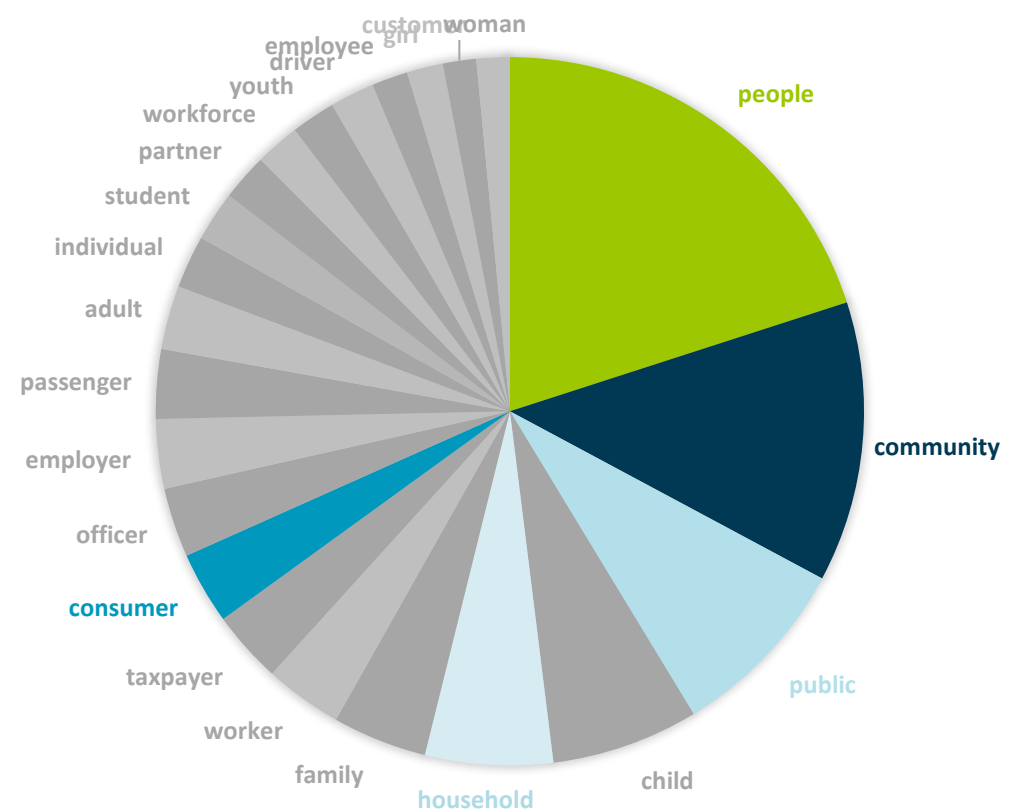
People are more likely to be described in terms of their economic role and function...

Relative frequency of 'people' nouns within each text

Energy & Climate Governance



Budget comparison

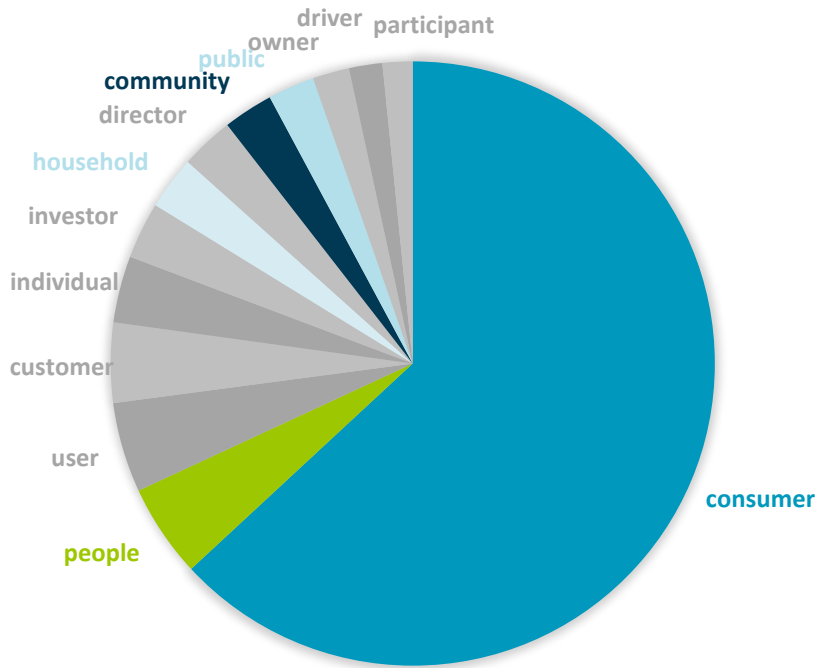


2. Economic language dominates

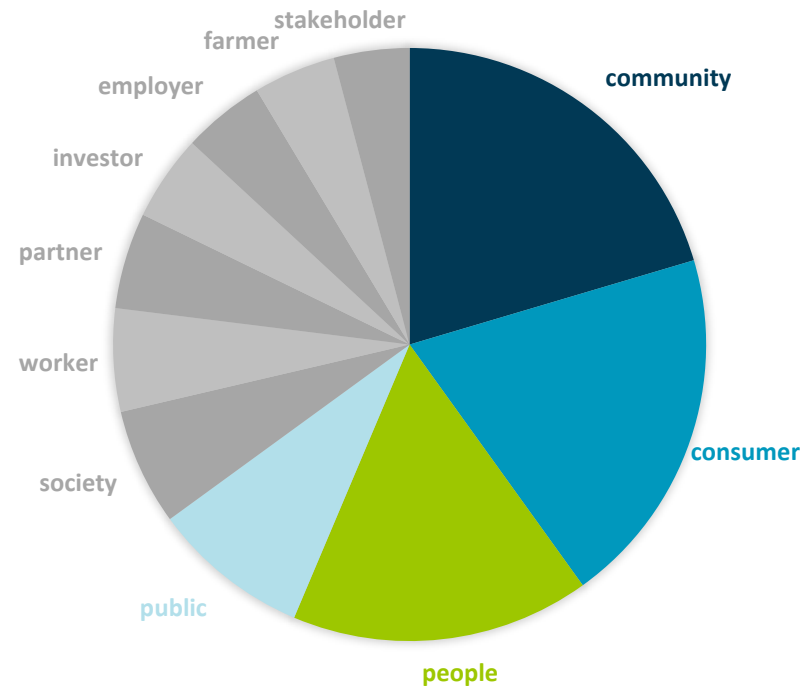
....but Regulators are different from the Net Zero Strategy

Relative frequency of 'people' nouns within each text

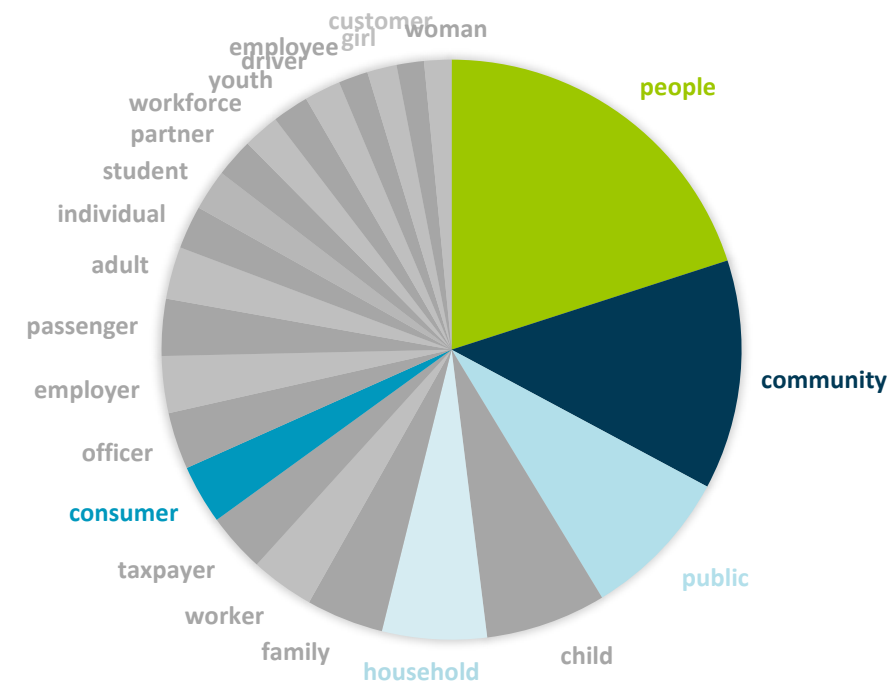
Regulators



Net Zero Strategy



Budget comparison



2. Economic language dominates

Stakeholders:

“Economics is the language of Whitehall... There’s lots of different impacts and considerations in policy that don’t neatly fit in with that lens, and they often get lost”

*“if you look at it from the point of view of Ofgem, then they **are** consumers”*

“You get lots of macroeconomics stuff, and then people saying ‘well, I’m not sure my mum would like this’ in a meeting. I think there’s slightly more evidence-based ways of doing it”

3. There is some reference to people's other roles

In the Net Zero Strategy, economic framing is dominant, but use of other words eg *people* (especially *young people*) and *community*

Top ten collocates (words frequently associated with keyword, giving the 'atmosphere' of a word)

top 10 collocates:
consumer

choice, grain, behaviour, businesses, choices, option, should, protect, inform, money

**individualised
language of cost and
choice**

top 10 collocates:
household

collections, vulnerable, income, poor, businesses, model, national, waste, help, fuel

**economic language,
more focused on
protection**

top 10 collocates:
people

young, backgrounds, children, businesses, knowledge, easier, make, business, nature, enable

**mixed, more active
language**

top 10 collocates:
community

local, regenerate, open, rural, groups, coastal, energy, solar, authorities, face

**collective, place-
based language**

3. There is some reference to people's other roles

There are stark differences in how the terms *consumer* and *young people* are used, in the Energy and Climate Governance corpus

Typical usage of *consumer* (465 occurrences in total) and *young people* (10 occurrences)

for businesses and benefits for	consumers	as new markets grow and
the factors that could affect	consumer	prices. There is significant uncertainty
Effective government signalling, shifts in	consumer	demand towards greener products, rapid
goods and services available to	consumers	. UK comparative advantage is partly
how to adapt to new	consumer	demand or competitor threats. The
is most efficient, and giving	consumers	more choice and lower prices.

economic, technical, passive, financial

focus on equipping children and	young people	with the knowledge and skills
advice; and, providing children and	young people	with the high-quality education
on the unique opportunity of	young people's	interest in climate change and
new generation of children and	young people	We are capitalising on this
the STEM sector, encouraging more	young people	from different backgrounds to choose
green sectors to ensure that	young people	secure the jobs of the

aspirational, educational, future-oriented

3. There is some reference to people's other roles

Stakeholders:

"I tried using the word 'citizen' in a number of documents and had it gently corrected every single time."

"you only get seen as a serious stakeholder if you mirror government's language back at it [...] if you want the traction with government, you use the words that make most sense to them."

Conclusions & implications

- Better use of social research
- Reforms to consultation processes
- More localized energy and climate strategies
- Limits to marketized approaches to energy

[Willis, R. Real people or “economic processing units”? The limited understanding of people’s roles in energy and climate governance. Energy Research and Social Science, volume 93, November 2022](#)