

Heating decarbonisation

'We need long-term pull rather than a short-term push'

Following his recent appointment as Chairman of the Heating and Hotwater Industry Council (HHIC), Pat Lehane, Editor, *Building Services Engineering* spoke with Henrik Juhl Hansen, about the challenges ahead and the key issues he wants the industry to address.

PL: Congratulations on your election as Chair of the Heating and Hotwater Industry Council (HHIC). Can you briefly outline who the organisation represents, and what its objectives currently are?

HH: Thank you, I am really looking forward to chairing the board of such a well-regarded industry body. The Heating and Hotwater Industry Council (HHIC) is a member organisation that aims to bring all areas of the heating and hot water industry together. At the HHIC we represent the full supply chain in the industry, working together using our technical expertise to help lobby government and understand any new regulatory changes in the sector and communicating this down the supply chain."

PL: As Managing Director of Vaillant in the UK and Ireland, how does being a major manufacturer of gas boilers and heat pumps affect your role. Is that a help or a hindrance?

HH: The move to decarbonisation must involve all stakeholders and Vaillant is proud to be playing its part. To achieve net zero goals and decarbonisation in the heating industry, a multi-technology approach is very essential. The HHIC has many working groups utilising all the skills that its members hold. Vaillant UK & Ireland has been a member for many years and, as a large organisation, we have

found the knowledge transfer very useful in both directions. In my new position at the HHIC, we'll be looking to bridge any knowledge gaps and to leverage all our partnerships with other sector associations as we all share one common goal – to decarbonise heating.

PL: HHIC is "technology agnostic" when it comes to decarbonising heating and hot water – what then do you see as the way forward, in the short-term and looking to 2050?

HH: The HHIC represents a wide range of member interests and looks at many different options to help decarbonise heating and hot water. Heat pumps are the here and now technology and we are aware that governments around Europe are also now considering the strategic use of hydrogen for heat. I am sure other technologies will also play their role as we move from the medium to the longer term.

PL: The European elections will take place later this year. Do you envisage any major policy reversals when it comes to energy and decarbonisation regulations?

HH: It is hard to say whether there will be any changes in the near future but regardless, decarbonisation in the heating industry is incredibly important and that is where the HHIC will focus its efforts.

PL: While heat pump sales increased in the UK last year, sales across Europe decreased. What are the factors influencing this trend?

HH: Until now, heat pumps have been more common and popular in some European countries than they have been in the UK and Ireland. Many European markets have slowed down over the last 12 months for various reasons, including a drop in gas prices and in some countries a lack of policy certainty. In the UK we've seen growth in the market, which has been influenced in part by the increasing number of installers undertaking training, more generous Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) funding, and a general increase of awareness among consumers.

PL: What is the biggest threat to the general uptake of heat pumps – costs or the shortage of qualified engineers to install them?

HH: There are multiple barriers to the uptake of heat pumps. The capital cost of installing a heat pump can be a deterrent. However, when we look at the UK, we have seen a fast uptake following the increase of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme which just shows the importance of funding support. In addition, the shortage of trained and competent installers and system designers is also a huge factor. However, in the UK the £500 Heat Training Grant has helped see an increase in the numbers undertaking training. The final challenge is the cost difference between gas and electricity. This varies widely across Europe and we see a greater uptake of heat pumps in markets where the price differential is smaller.

I am looking forward to addressing all these barriers with the HHIC and working with all parties to ensure routes into the heat pump industry are clear, well-promoted and can support a successful business.

Of course, decarbonising heating with heat pumps is not the only answer to reaching net zero goals. I think there are also challenges to be overcome on the heating system as a whole, and to ensuring that current systems are designed as low-flow temperature systems.

PL: Is HHIC in favour of Government intervention in the heating sector by way of subsidies or consumer grants?

HH: Any support or grants for both consumers and the upskilling of the trade will always be gratefully received and it is imperative to the success of reaching targets. It is important that any initiative drives a long-term pull rather than a short-term push.

PL: Should Government invest in additional heat pump installation training for installers, or is that the role of the manufacturers?

HH: Today, many manufacturers are continuing to invest in all areas from production to training, but any further support is welcome from government. As part of the HHIC, it is our place to ensure that both industry and government work together in order to reach joint goals and decarbonise heating. The Heat Training Grant available in the UK, which offers £500 to installers taking recognised heat pump courses, has proved successful and we have seen a marked increase in the number of installers undertaking training.

PL: In Ireland the talk is of reducing the Heat Loss Indicator (HLI), while in the UK the Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) sees the requirement for loft or cavity wall insulation being removed when installing heat pumps. Do you think this trend is correct?

HH: It is quite clear that there are

inconsistencies across the UK and Ireland. It is positive that both the Irish and UK governments recognise that this is a complex challenge and that there are many problems to be addressed. Reducing heat loss by increasing insulation will always prove successful since it will reduce the amount of energy needed and therefore save consumer's money. We understand why the UK has acted to try and simplify the process of installing a heat pump by removing the need for cavity wall and loft insulation. However, we would urge the Irish government to look across Europe for best practise in this respect.

PL: On the question of boilers, is it realistic to expect gas boilers to be entirely phased out by 2050? Will there be a gas supply through the grid beyond that date?

HH: We need ambitious targets if we are to decarbonise home heating but equally, we need to recognise the complexity of the challenge. Setting a date for the phase-out of gas gives us the target but currently the industry does not fully understand how we can decarbonise every property just yet. We must recognise that consumers must be put at the heart of the decarbonisation journey and given a say in how we decarbonise our homes. We also need to recognise that, irrespective of the date that new fossil fuel appliances will be phased out, existing appliances will continue to operate and need to be maintained in a safe and serviceable condition.

PL: Finally, what are the specific targets for your tenure as Chair of HHIC?

HH: I'm looking forward to our first meeting to agree targets together as an association. Decarbonisation is a big task and it is going to take the whole industry working together collaboratively to achieve net zero. ■



Henrik Juhl Hansen, Chairman of the Heating and Hotwater Industry Council (HHIC).