



Exeter City Council

EXETER CITY COUNCIL **HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)** **ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY**

Introduction

The past few years has seen a growth in awareness of environmental issues. With assets of over 5000 houses and flats plus garages and common areas as well as other ancillary land, Housing Services has a responsibility to minimise its environmental impact, not only to its own residents but to the wider Exeter community.

This policy will set out the framework that Housing Services will adopt to increase the environmental sustainability across the full range of its operations and work.

There are a number of corporate documents that should be read in conjunction with this policy –

- Exeter City Council Environmental Strategy 2007 – 2012.
- Sustainable Purchasing Policy 2007.
- Exeter Climate Change Strategy 2008-2018
- Housing Asset Management Strategy 2009 – 2015.
- Sustainable Procurement and Commissioning Strategy 2009-2012.

The government has set targets of reducing CO₂ emissions by 60% from all housing by the year 2050. Because of the stock profile across the country these targets will only be met by dramatic improvements being made to the existing stock.

The key objectives of this policy are to:

- Increase the resource efficiency of our stock by improvements to the average SAP ratings.
- Improve performance on fuel poverty.
- Minimise energy and water usage to reduce carbon dioxide emissions
- Manage vehicles to minimise carbon emissions, fuel consumption and air pollution
- Minimise waste by reducing waste production at source and reusing and recycling waste.
- Procure materials from local sources where possible.
- Use local labour where possible.
- Use environmentally friendly and sustainable products where possible.

The key aims of this policy are to:

- Improve the safety and quality of accommodation to residents.
- Incorporate environmental protection and sustainability measures within planned and major works programmes.
- Ensure that all staff, contractors and residents are kept fully informed of, and committed to, the need for these measures and of the Council's policy and strategy.

Environmental and sustainability standards will also apply to new build properties, whether they are the Council's own build schemes, housing association developments or new affordable housing built by private developers through Section 106 agreements. In these cases Homes and Community Agency grant will only be available where the homes meet the current Code for Sustainable Homes criteria, the Lifetime Homes standard and other sustainability measures.

Background

Information in terms of what we know about the stock is crucial in establishing targets and understanding what needs to be done to achieve those targets.

The Council currently uses a stock condition database called Omega that holds information on the condition of various property attributes. Although the last survey was completed in 2004 the information is being constantly updated from various major works programmes to ensure it is as up to date as possible. It is planned to start a resurvey of all the stock during 2009/10. The new survey will be loaded into a new database called Codeman.

The authority is planning to undertake an exercise in using the Ecohomes XB toolkit that will provide further valuable information on the current standard of the stock, this will be completed by December 2009. Once this is completed an action plan can be developed.

A great deal of work has already been undertaken by way of planned and major works contracts to improve the environmental sustainability of the ECC housing stock: This includes:

- The majority of stock has upvc double glazed windows and doors.
- Programmes of work have been undertaken to install wall cavity insulation and increase loft insulation.
- Some use of renewable energy solutions – solar panels and air source heat pumps.
- Provision of energy saving bulbs on empty properties and electrical rewires.
- Replacement of old heating systems with more efficient 'A' rated gas central heating boilers, complete with thermostatic controls.

Housing Services has set up an Energy and Sustainability Group that will meet at regular periods. The main activities of the group will be to:

- Develop and deliver an action plan to improve energy efficiency and sustainability within the Council's existing stock.
- Review and advise on the use of new technologies.
- Keep under review the targets that have been set.
- Review the use of different products used on maintenance and repairs and major works programmes.

Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) Ratings

One of the most important factors in understanding the energy efficiency of the stock and what properties need to be targeted to reduce fuel poverty is the production of SAP ratings.

The Council uses the 2005 SAP rating system and the current targets for the average SAP rating are –

- 2009/10 SAP rating of 67.96
- 2010/11 SAP rating of 68.41
- 2011/12 SAP rating of 68.86
- 2012/13 SAP rating of 69.31
- 2014/15 SAP rating of 69.76

During 2009 Housing Services will set targets for minimum SAP ratings and how it will achieve them.

Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's)

The emergence of EPC's offers further opportunity to add valuable information on stock performance in terms of a homes ability to conserve energy and minimise carbon emissions. It can also be used as a benchmark against which we can measure ourselves against other social landlords.

In accordance with the regulations EPC's will be produced when:

- There are new tenancies.
- A section 125 Offer Notice is sent to a tenant who has exercised the Right to Buy.

At the time of the inspection other energy saving measures will be checked:

- Cavity wall insulation.
- Level of loft insulation (minimum level of 250mm).
- Hot water cylinder jacket.

If any of these fall below the required standards or are missing altogether then the Domestic Energy Assessor (DEA) undertaking the inspection will arrange for the insulation work to be carried out.

Empty Properties (Voids)

The voids process gives officers the opportunity to undertake a comprehensive property inspection which can provide a useful checklist to target improvements. In addition to the checks set out above the following will be carried out:

- At the completion of any void work contractors will install an energy saving light bulb to each light fitting.
- When the gas engineers return to the property at the start of the new tenancy they will set up and explain the controls to the new tenant.
- Energy saving advice will be offered to the new tenant by the supply of an Energy Advice leaflet and training offered by relevant officers.

Major works programmes

Major works programmes are an ideal opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of a dwelling and to ensure that the new products being brought in to the property are environmentally sustainable. For example:

- When new heating systems are installed or existing systems replaced the boilers will be high efficiency gas boilers and will include thermostatic radiator valves and room controls. Annually we will review the boiler we fit as part of the programme to ensure that it is the most cost effective and efficient one.
- We will continue with cavity wall insulation work to achieve a target of all properties having had this work carried out by 2011.
- All new light fittings installed on any of the refurbishment schemes will be capable of receiving energy saving bulbs.
- Future programmes will consider the replacement of electric heating with high efficiency gas boilers or the use of renewable technology.
- All kitchen units will have Forest Stewardship Council Accreditation.
- All new bathrooms will be fitted with low volume dual flush toilets and water saving taps.
- Every time an electrical rewire is completed the tenant will be supplied with whole-house energy saving light bulbs.

New Build Schemes – In-fill sites

The Council is currently embarking on a programme of providing new affordable homes on a number of in-fill sites on housing land across the city. These new build properties will be developed by either the Council or its housing association partner for this project – Sovereign Housing Association. All properties on these sites have been designed to achieve high environmental standards. For example, as a minimum all the homes will meet the Code for Sustainable Homes level 4, and where possible this will be increased to level 5. All properties will also meet the Lifetime Homes Standard. Finally, because of the technology used to heat the properties the level of fuel consumption will be low, thereby reducing fuel bills for tenants.

Information and Training

Training is a fundamental part of changing attitudes and behaviour towards environmental issues.

Tenants cannot make decisions about issues such as the correct use of their heating or the most appropriate energy tariff unless they are given the correct information.

Visiting officers are in a prime position to help offer advice and guidance to occupiers on energy use and any other environmental issues. Training will be offered to all these officers on an annual basis so that the advice they offer is current and relevant.

The council will undertake to develop an energy and sustainability advice leaflet that will be supplied to tenants at accompanied lets and at other times when visiting officers call to properties. These measures will help occupiers to make informed choices on the way their homes are used.

Funding

Partnering arrangements with a variety of organisations such as EDF (formerly SWEB), British Gas, Centrica, Scottish and Southern and Climate energy have been in place for some years. These arrangements have been successful in obtaining over £800,000 of external funding for energy efficiency measures including:

- Loft and wall cavity insulation. This programme is being completed at a faster rate than would otherwise have been possible and allowed capital spending to be targeted elsewhere.
- Fuel switching
- Energy efficiency boilers
- External insulation
- Low-energy light bulbs

Future reviews of the Housing capital programme will ensure funding is made available to continue improving the energy efficiency of the stock. For example, the current Asset Management Strategy signals a change to our existing programme from 2010 to ensure we target those properties with expensive and inefficient heating system and replace them with new efficient forms for heating.

Renewables

Currently the payback for carrying out one-off renewable projects is fairly long term because of the cost of the technologies involved.

However if the authority is determined to reduce its overall carbon emissions then this is an area it will have to consider a lot more critically in the future. Housing Services will constantly review the use of renewable energy technology when it carries out major refurbishment programmes and it will encourage the use of such technologies with its new build partners.

At the moment there is limited funding available for renewables and the process for bidding can be bureaucratic and cumbersome. However, this situation is likely to change as new Government programmes are introduced and therefore funding streams will be constantly monitored.

Conclusion

This document underlines Housing Services' commitment to providing good quality, energy efficient and affordable homes to people in housing need. It acknowledges the impact its actions can have on the wider environment and it will work to reduce any adverse impact in the future.

It is intended that this document is used as a baseline statement and that the Energy and Sustainability Group will now work to establish an action plan that will set targets, goals and objectives to develop and enhance this strategy.

November 2009