

10. Energy efficiency, fuel poverty and sustainability

10.1 Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

Improving energy efficiency in the home is a high priority. The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) set a target of reducing energy consumption in domestic dwellings by 30% by 2011. The HECA Progress Report for East Devon¹ shows that since 1996 we have reduced energy consumption by 21.59%.

In East Devon the recognised standard for measuring the energy efficiency of homes (SAP - the mean Standard Assessment Procedure) is 54 in the private sector and 71 for council housing (June 2008). We aim to make significant improvement on the SAP rating for council housing with a target of achieving a SAP rating of 75 by December 2010. From October 2008 we will be carrying out an Energy Performance survey on all council owned dwellings which are sold or re-let.

This strategy seeks to progress a wide range of energy saving initiatives, many in partnership with other local authorities and organisations. These initiatives include:

- the 'Heat Project'
- Devon Warm Zones.

The **Heat Project** is operated through Enact Energy and funded by the utility companies, who are set targets by government to promote energy efficiency. Many companies provide discounted energy efficiency materials (such as low energy light bulbs) to householders. The Government's own scheme of grant assistance, '**Warmfront**' is available to many people on certain benefits.

Devon Warm Zones is a new three year project, launched in April 2008, being run by a partnership of all the district councils and unitary authorities across Devon. Its aim is to reduce fuel poverty, cut fuel bills, improve health and cut carbon emissions. It will also play an important role in Devon's work to tackle climate change.

It is delivered by Westcountry Energy Action, who also manages the Devon Energy Efficiency Advice Centre. The aim is to target 140,000 households in Devon to increase the take up of energy efficiency grants and measures to make their homes warmer. Within the county several 'warm zones' have been chosen, where extra energy efficiency measures and resources will be targeted to reach all households and help them access energy advice, reduce fuel poverty and create warmer, healthier and cheaper to run homes. In East Devon the first phase of the warm zone project is in Exmouth. The project aims to reach the fuel poor but there will be advice and offers for everyone living within East Devon. It will bring financial benefits to the community as most homes could save about one third off their fuel bills a year (around £300).

Fuel poverty occurs where a household has to spend more than 10% of its income on heating and hot water. It is caused by a combination of factors including:

- poor insulation or lack of heating
- low household income
- under occupancy (such as a single person living in a large house)
- fuel prices.

¹ Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, Eleventh Progress Report (2007), for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007

The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform predicts that every one percent increase in energy bills will result in 40,000 more people in the UK being brought into fuel poverty.

The Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006² found that overall fuel poverty within East Devon is 13.2%, rising to 16.9% in Exmouth, with the rate for the private rented sector being 18.6%.

We worked in partnership with all other Devon authorities to produce the Devon Affordable Warmth Strategy³ in 2004. The key aims of the strategy are:

- to provide affordable warmth by improving the energy efficiency of homes in Devon
- to provide effective energy efficiency services that reach the most vulnerable members of the community
- to maximise income and ensure uptake of benefits and grants by households
- to ensure residents have access to an affordable fuel supply.

The pooling of resources across Devon and the appointment of the Devon Affordable Warmth Officer ensures a co-ordinated and effective approach to tackling fuel poverty.

Our Corporate Strategy⁴ gives a commitment to work in partnership with energy providers and other agencies to improve the energy efficiency of houses and reduce fuel poverty. It has set a target of reducing the estimated number of households currently experiencing fuel poverty in East Devon (7150) by five percent and the work within the warm zone will help to achieve this.

10.2 Sustainability

We are committed to the principles of sustainability in all our activities. As stated in the East Devon Sustainable Community Plan⁵ we should be seeking to make all of our communities 'sustainable'. Nothing we do should prejudice the future of our current quality of life and preferably it should be enhanced. We want future generations to be able to enjoy what we have now. To this end we have put in place a Sustainable Development Strategy (June 2005). We have also signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change⁶ which commits us to delivering the UK Climate Change Programme⁷ at the local level.

We aim to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, contribute to a high quality of life, and provide opportunity and choice. We want to achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

The East Devon Local Plan⁸ states that great importance is placed on achieving sustainable development. The location of new residential development and the characteristics of dwellings built are key to moving toward greater sustainability. Housing allocations and criteria based policies seek to ensure that new dwellings will be built on sites that are in close proximity to public transport with good accessibility to employment opportunities, services and facilities. Design policies in the plan promote efficient buildings and environmentally friendly building standards.

² Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006, June 2007, Professional Partnership Services Group

³ Devon Affordable Warmth Strategy – working together for warmer homes – www.exeter.gov.uk

⁴ East Devon Corporate Strategy December 2007 – www.eastdevon.gov.uk

⁵ East Devon Sustainable Community Plan 2006-2016, East Devon Local Strategic Partnership, www.eastdevon.gov.uk

⁶ www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/housingbuildings/localauthorities/NottinghamDeclaration/

⁷ www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/ukccp/index

⁸ East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011 Adopted July 2006 www.eastdevon.gov.uk

Our approach to sustainability attempts to address housing in its broadest sense, urban and rural, social and private, and demonstrates our commitment to working in partnership with residents, other housing providers and interested organisations.

Our approach is:

- comprehensive – involving action across all tenures
- targeted – making effective use of available resources
- responsive - to the needs of residents and the views of other agencies
- enabling – by encouraging partnership with private sector investment through innovative measures and policies
- realistic – matching scarce resources to achievable targets.

We have made a pledge to facilitate the introduction of sustainable construction into our policies and practices, through the regional sustainable construction programme 'Future Foundations – building a better South West'⁹. We will develop and implement a sustainable construction policy to ensure that through our own service delivery we achieve more sustainable construction and refurbishment throughout the district. The partners involved in implementing this strategy will be encouraged to make a commitment to sustainable construction and refurbishment.

We have put in place a Climate Change Strategy (April 2008) which is targeted at:

- our own energy reduction and efficiency
- reducing and halting emissions from new developments by securing low and zero carbon new development
- domestic energy reduction and efficiency
- assisting partners in securing business energy reduction and efficiency
- assisting partners in securing reduction of emissions from transport.

Our Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan are due to be published in March 2009. This will include the energy used in council owned housing within the baseline measure of our own carbon footprint. This should act as an incentive for additional measures to reduce emissions from housing stock.

⁹ Future foundations: building a better south west – a sustainable construction charter for the south west - www.futurefoundations.co.uk