

LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY WORKSHOP
HOUSE CONDITION, FUEL POVERTY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
TUESDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2017– SALUTATION HOTEL, PERTH



Background

As part of our Local Housing Strategy (LHS) Update, a series of workshops were organised for each of our four LHS themes. Stakeholders with a professional involvement in each of the themes were invited to attend workshops on Tuesday 5 September 2017, in Perth, with a view to:

1. Reviewing the key priorities and challenges of each LHS theme;
2. Acknowledging best practice examples and considering whether there was scope for us to be doing anything better; and
3. Reviewing the existing Action Plan and identifying whether any changes were required.

Event Summary

A total of 13 stakeholders attended this workshop (list of attendees can be found in Appendix 1).

Lorna Cameron (Interim Director - Housing and Community Safety) welcomed all delegates to the morning session before delegates were split into workshop groups to discuss their particular workshop theme.

Each workshop session consisted of a few short presentations on the theme to prompt discussion on the key priorities and challenges before best practice examples were discussed and finally the Action Plan for the theme was reviewed.

At the end of all discussions, delegates from both workshops gathered back together and Eileen McMullan (Planning & Commissioning Manager) provided a summary of the key pieces of information from each workshop and explained that the information from the day would now be written up and taken to Housing and Communities Committee in November 2017.

Delegates were then given the opportunity to provide feedback on the event or any topics they would like to see covered at future LHS events by noting this down on post-it notes contained within their packs.

Presentations

Electronic versions of the PowerPoint Presentations will be circulated along with the workshop summaries.

Key Discussion Points

House Condition, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change Priorities

- Residents are aware of and have opportunities to maximise their incomes;
- Residents live in warm, dry, energy efficient and low carbon homes which they can afford to heat;
- The cost of fuel for households is reduced through changes in heating regime;

There was general agreement that the priorities were correct in terms of trying to improve the condition and energy efficiency levels of the housing stock across all tenures in order to reduce the resulting impact this has on climate change. An important way of doing this is by ensuring that people are aware of the help and support available to them and ways in which they can maximise their income and reduce their fuel bills.

However, when discussing the Action Plan later in the session it was highlighted that the layout and presentation of the Action Plan does not necessarily reflect the priorities and the targets would need to also be revised as some do not make sense. It was therefore agreed that the priorities and Action Plan would be looked at again.

The proposals for new (clearer and more specific) priorities for this section are now below and are being proposed after considering the general discussion and comments during the workshop session. Comments on the suitability of these would be much appreciated:

- **All residents are living in good quality and energy efficient homes which meet the relevant standards;**
- **Residents are living in homes they can afford to heat and are aware of opportunities to maximise their incomes;**
- **People are aware of the assistance available to them to improve the energy efficiency levels of their homes;**
- **People are aware of ways in which they can reduce fuel consumption and save on energy costs.**

House Condition, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change Challenges

The following challenges were highlighted during discussions in this workshop session:

- **Geography**

The geography and rural nature of Perth and Kinross means that certain areas are prone to higher energy costs due to the limited access to the gas grid. Certain areas also have higher numbers of older, detached and 'hard to treat' properties which can impact on energy efficiency levels. Rural communities can be particularly affected by high energy costs as a result of funding challenges to install more energy efficient measures and difficulties to secure competitive prices from contractors due to the lack of economies of scale. It might also be the case that people in rural communities have lower disposable incomes due to other costs associated with them living rurally such as transport or due to the fact they have moved to quieter areas following retirement. This can mean that many may suffer from fuel poverty as a result of being 'asset rich' but 'cash poor'.

- **Weather**

A particular challenge relating to climate change is the fact that there will also be warmer summers in the future. We need to consider how we will address high temperatures in the summers and the impact this might have on vulnerable groups as well as more extreme weather patterns and higher risks of floods, severe winds and snowfall in the winters. The damper, wetter conditions will also have consequences for the condition of properties if left unaddressed. We need to raise awareness for people to take steps to maintain internal temperatures to mitigate the impact of external weather conditions. It is also important to consider design features in new build developments which may assist with effects of climate change (such as Greener Gardens).

- **Inequality and Early Identification**

Discussion took place around ensuring vulnerable people including the elderly, children, people with disabilities and those on low incomes are prioritised for energy efficiency improvements and awareness raising activities. The information from the Local House Condition Survey must be used to increase awareness on the help and support available to these priority groups as soon as possible (and especially how factors such as under occupation and other measures which can be considered such as management of stock within Council and RSL tenancies).

- **Technology**

An example was given of a recent event in which a piece of technology was discussed which had the potential to regulate temperatures within the home to within 5 degrees of the outside temperature. This isn't great if temperatures outside are incredibly high as it would still be too warm inside the home. Discussion took place around how technology in general is becoming 'smarter' and the challenge to this is being able use this to establish ways in which to operate more effectively. For example, will energy providers be able to share the information from Smart Meters with Partners as a way of using the information to help provide support to vulnerable people?

- **Private Rented Sector**

Perth and Kinross has a growing Private Rented Sector and many issues were discussed in relation to this. Our Local House Condition Survey found that the highest level of disrepair and extensive disrepair was within this sector. The current regulation of this sector is through the Repairing Standard although it lacks similar standards to that of the social housing sector. This means that tenants of Private Landlords are experiencing some of the worst house conditions and energy efficiency levels within the local area. Some examples were highlighted including tenants living in poor housing conditions who are too 'scared' to complain to their Landlord as the Landlord is a member of the local community. Another example was given of the poor conditions experienced by tenants entering new leases through the Rent Bond Guarantee Scheme. Another problem is the failure of all Private Landlords to register with the Local Authority. Although the Scottish Government recently consulted on energy efficiency and condition standards within the Private Rented Sector, it was felt that the penalties proposed for failing to comply with the standards were not severe enough to force Private Landlords into improving their stock. Another potential issue is the proposal for Local Authorities to enforce these penalties given current staffing remits within Local Authorities.

- **Changes in Behaviour**

It is very difficult to measure how someone's behaviour or pattern of energy use has changed over a given period. Whilst there is the possibility that we might be able to gather data from energy providers when Smart meters have been rolled out, this is still an uncertainty. In the meantime we need to be raising awareness of energy efficiency measures and ways to reduce energy costs. Follow up visits should be offered to people to ensure than behaviour changes are sustainable and any changes in circumstances can be addressed quickly ('trigger points') as it is often the case that people can move into and out of fuel poverty regularly based on changes in circumstances. Perth and Kinross tends to have much lower levels of referrals to Home Energy Scotland compared with the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire so this is perhaps an area which can be improved upon within the Action Plan.

- **Changes and Timing of Programmes**

It was felt that the timescales given to prepare and submit bids for funding are often extremely tight (specific reference was made to the HEEPS Capital Accelerated Programme). The timescales in which to deliver the improvements are also very difficult to meet. This raises challenges in terms of planning and organising improvement programmes and also in terms of funding applications for more rural communities. It was suggested that perhaps RSL's and Councils could have some projects waiting to progress as soon as funding announcements are made. Another huge challenge is the ability to keep up to date with all the funding changes (especially in relation to ECO schemes). A change in 'mind set' is required from the public and acceptance of a move towards improvement loans as opposed to grants for improvements. It is for Local Authorities and Partner organisations to direct people to the correct agencies that can provide the best advice on these schemes. Perhaps more could be done around the Climate Challenge Fund?

- **General Property Conditions**

There can often be cases of properties within the private sector which are 'borderline' and whilst they are not technically falling below the relevant standards,

they are also not in a good state of repair by any means. There is currently no way in which to deal with this issue. We need to be trying to advise people of the links between poor housing conditions and the impact this can have on people's health and the environment and encouraging people to maintain their properties.

House Condition, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change Best Practice

The following best practice examples were discussed during the workshop session:

- ✓ Use of a number of sources to gather information on areas and households with the greatest priority of need (e.g. Local House Condition Surveys, Energy Savings Trust Databases, Heat Mapping Data, Other Local Knowledge etc.);
- ✓ Use of Climate 'Sensitivity' Maps to determine particular areas within Local Authorities which are sensitive to more extreme weather conditions and the impact this can have on the condition of a property;
- ✓ Demonstration Home at HEAT office in Dundee;
- ✓ HEAT Advisors also trained in HES information – 'one stop shop' approach to information and advice;
- ✓ Project Work with Offenders (i.e. Castle Huntly);
- ✓ Forums for Private Sector Landlords (EST and HES) to raise awareness of the help and support available to Landlords and Private Tenants;
- ✓ Regular Talks in Local Authority Offices for members of the public;
- ✓ New Tenant Home Visits to discuss energy saving tips and heating controls etc. (HEAT and Hillcrest Housing Association)
- ✓ Employee Engagement Events to Raise Awareness.

House Condition, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change Action Plan

It was highlighted that the layout and presentation of the Action Plan does not necessarily clearly reflect the priorities of this theme. Some targets do not make sense in relation to the actions they relate to and also there could be targets relating to the advice given in relation to fuel poverty and more targets on raising awareness. It was agreed that the comments relating to the Action Plan would be taken on board and this would be looked at again in more detail before the update on the strategy is taken to Committee in November. Work will be carried out to clarify the priorities and actions further and present targets which are easily measurable. Further consultation on the revised Action Plan will take place at future events.

APPENDIX 1

The delegates who attended the workshop on House Condition, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change are listed below:

Name	Organisation	Position
Gillian Conway	Perth & Kinross Council	Planning & Policy Officer
John Cruickshank	Perth & Kinross Council	Projects Team Leader
Graham Esson	Perth & Kinross Council	Sustainability, Policy and Research Team Leader
Rod Hanchard-Goodwin	Energy Savings Trust	Data Management and Reporting Officer
Thane Lawrie	SCARF	Chief Executive
David Mackay	SCARF	Advice Team Leader (HEAT)
Mark McArthur	Energy Savings Trust	ECO Support Officer
Eileen McMullan	Perth & Kinross Council	Planning & Commissioning Manager
Craig Thompson	Hillcrest Housing Association	Energy Advisor
Kirsty Steven	Perth & Kinross Council	Principal Officer - Health and Safety
Lindsey Restruck	SSE	ECO Performance Manager
Ranjana Salins	PKAVS	Minority Communities Hub
Scott Restruck	Energy Action Scotland	Technical & Training Manager