

Environment Strategy 2013 - 2016

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. EXTERNAL CONTEXT
 - 2.1. Welfare Reform
 - 2.2 Rising Energy Prices
 - 2.3 The Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation
3. OUR STRATEGY
 - 3.1 Affordable Warmth, Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency
 - 3.2 Adapting to Climate Change
 - 3.3 Procurement
 - 3.4 Waste
 - 3.5 Biodiversity
 - 3.6 Transport
 - 3.7 Water
 - 3.8 Continuous Improvement
4. VALUE FOR MONEY
5. SUMMARY
 - 5.1 Equality and Diversity Implications

1. INTRODUCTION

Yorkshire Housing recognises that its operations of developing new homes and maintaining existing homes, as well as providing employment for 750 staff who work out of a number of offices, has a significant impact on the environment. This Strategy sets out Yorkshire Housing's priorities in this area. Our highest priorities are to alleviate fuel poverty amongst our customers, to provide warm homes and to respond to the effects of climate change. We also have an obligation to help preserve our natural environment for both present and future generations.

Over recent years Yorkshire Housing has been working to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes through its Environmental Performance Programme. This programme has seen the upgrading of heating systems and installation of insulation, above and beyond the requirements for Decent Homes. We have trialled the insulation of solid wall properties and the use of air and ground source heat pumps, and have carried out monitoring of the running costs for different heating systems in different property types. Yorkshire Housing also builds new homes with environmental considerations in mind. Homes are built to a minimum standard of Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3. In recent years we have experimented with building to Levels 4, 5 and 6 but have come to an organisational decision that, when spending our own money, building to Level 3 provides the best value for money. This means that we can better balance the cost of developing new homes against investing in existing homes and building additional homes. Over recent years technologies including air and ground source heat pumps and solar thermal and photovoltaic panels have been used. Going forward we are committed to investing in a 'fabric-first' approach and will consider the use of renewable technologies where appropriate.

Yorkshire Housing has developed this strategy with the aim to minimise our environmental impact, respond to the effects of rising energy costs and to support our wider work in response to Welfare Reform. The strategy was developed following extensive staff and customer consultation at workshop sessions and through discussions with Customer Services Committee and Board. An environment action plan will be developed to support the delivery of this strategy which will be subject to our resource and operational planning methodologies.

To deliver this strategy we will work to access at least £3 million of government and energy company grants and subsidies, most of which will go towards increasing the energy efficiency of our homes to help combat fuel poverty. We will also seek out Water Authority and Environment Agency subsidies for our work on responding to the effects of climate change.

2. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The UK needs to become more energy efficient to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change. The Climate Change Act 2008 legislated for a reduction in our carbon emissions, compared to 1990, of 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. 80% of current homes are expected to be in use by 2050, so there is a real need to improve the environmental performance of existing homes.

2.1. Welfare Reform

The introduction of the Welfare Reform means that many Yorkshire Housing customers will see a reduction in their disposable incomes. This will make it increasingly difficult for our customers to pay for their energy and water bills.

2.2. Rising Energy Prices

Rising gas and electricity prices means that many families are struggling to heat their homes. Some households are being forced to choose between being able to either heat or eat. Since 2004 the average energy bill has more than doubled from just over £500 to more than £1200 in 2011 (Source: 'This is money'). What is more, energy prices are continuing to rise.

2.3. The Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation

The Green Deal was launched in October 2012. At present, Yorkshire Housing is not looking to become a Green Deal provider or to partner with a provider. We are instead aiming to use our own finances in addition to funding from Energy Company Obligation (ECO), the Renewable Heat Premium Payment and other sources of funding to improve the energy efficiency of our homes. In this way we hope to protect our current and future customers from paying Green Deal charges at a time when many customers are being hit disproportionately hard by the effects of Welfare Reform and when many customers are unemployed.

We will continue to monitor the development of the Green Deal agenda, paying particular attention to how other social landlords are responding to the Green Deal and we will be prepared to change and adapt our approach if and when the situation changes and as new initiatives are developed.

3. OUR STRATEGY

The main areas of impact on the environment are within the following themes:

1. Affordable Warmth and Energy Efficiency
2. Adapting to Climate Change
3. Procurement
4. Waste
5. Biodiversity
6. Transport
7. Water Efficiency

These themes are discussed throughout this strategy, whilst acknowledging that we have an environmental impact through:

- Our Homes (both new build and existing)
- Our People (customers and staff)
- Our Business (including facilities, offices and processes)

3.1. Affordable Warmth, Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

The challenge:

As 66% of energy used in the home is for heating it is important for homes to have efficient heating systems and to be well insulated (to keep the heat in), with a fabric

first approach. This will help reduce customer energy bills and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. As energy costs rise and, in many cases, household incomes are static or declining, the number of households in fuel poverty is increasing. Many households will find that their disposable income is reduced further due to the Welfare Reform, causing more households to be at risk from fuel poverty.

For Yorkshire Housing, this is an important issue but one which is sometimes difficult for us to address. This is because we have approximately 800 properties without access to the mains gas network, a significant number of properties heated by storage heaters and approximately 1800 solid wall properties which are difficult to insulate. We need to ensure that all our homes are well insulated and draught proofed and this needs to be combined with effective ventilation to prevent condensation and mould problems. We also need to continue and expand our work in upgrading inefficient heating systems.

We have a Property Disposals Strategy to ensure that 'one-off' properties and those outside of our core areas are considered for disposal, as well as those which are beyond economic repair or conversion. The high costs of making some of our properties fit for 2050 will require us to apply the Disposals Strategy to ensure a sustainable financial future for Yorkshire Housing.

Our Financial Inclusion Strategy acknowledges many of the difficulties our customers face. Fuel Poverty, where a household pays more than 10% of its income on energy, is on the rise. In 2009 3.9 million households in England were classified as being in fuel poverty; by 2011 this figure had risen to 5.3 million households. In Yorkshire and Humber, a quarter of all households are currently classified as being fuel poor. Fuel poverty is linked to household income, energy prices and the energy efficiency of the home. (Source of figures: National Energy Action).

Our response:

We will focus on a 'fabric first' approach, ensuring that our homes are 'future proofed' by making them well insulated and air tight with appropriate ventilation systems. This will help to ensure that whatever heating system is in the property, it is more affordable to use. To do this we will concentrate our efforts on those properties which are 'hard to treat' (i.e. those with solid walls and / or off the mains gas network). We will also continue to upgrade loft insulation in our properties.

We will also continue to upgrade heating systems. We will install efficient gas boilers in properties with access to the mains gas network. In our off-gas properties, we will install heating systems which are suitable for the property type and size. In most cases this will either be storage heaters or solid fuel, but we will continue to keep abreast with the development of low carbon technologies (such as ground source heat pumps) and use these when grants can be accessed which bring their install costs closer to that of traditional heating systems. Our approach generally will not be to install experimental technologies within customers homes instead only proposing to use renewable technologies when the use and benefits are clearly understood. We will carefully specify heating, insulation and ventilation upgrades to minimise customer fuel bills and carbon emissions.

Improving the insulation and heating systems in our properties will increase their SAP [Standard Assessment Procedure] scores. We will work to increase the average SAP of our existing properties from a current level of 66.84, concentrating on those

properties with the lowest SAP first. Although we currently measure the environmental performance of our housing stock using SAP, we are exploring alternative targets and methods to enable us to measure this more effectively and to benchmark ourselves against other comparable housing providers.

We acknowledge that it will be important for us to increase our colleague and customer understanding of the interaction between heating, insulation and ventilation, with the aims of helping to minimise customer fuel bills and of helping customers to live healthier, more comfortable lives. To this end we will ensure that staff receive appropriate training in these areas.

We are currently carrying out a formal trial through the National Housing Federation's 'Count Us In' Pilot. This focuses on customer communication around energy efficiency behaviour change. Once this trial is completed in September 2013 we will develop an energy efficiency advice package for customers, with the aim of helping customers to reduce their annual energy use by 10%. This package will consist of a combination of leaflets, face-to-face advice, advice regarding switching energy provider and free and low-cost 'tools' such as shower timers and WC cistern hippos.

We will carry out targeted work to minimise the number of our customers at risk of fuel poverty. We will work with our customers to ensure they have access to the best energy tariff and to explore ways of helping customers with oil central heating to purchase heating oil. We will develop a method to identify and keep a register of vulnerable customers most at risk of being in fuel poverty, and develop a route to refer these for money and benefit advice.

3.2. Adapting to Climate Change

The challenge:

The world's climate is changing, and will probably continue to do so into the future. The UK is likely to see more extreme weather conditions such as hotter and drier summers and more periods of extremely heavy rainfall leading to flooding. This will impact on how we run the business; our customers' lives and how we manage our properties. Yorkshire Housing needs to ensure that our homes are suitably adapted to cope with these changing weather patterns.

Our response:

We will measure our impact on climate change by monitoring our emissions. We will develop and refurbish homes using a specification to ensure that they are better adapted to cope with more extreme weather events. For example, by encouraging permeable surfaces in gardens and communal areas such as lawns and permeable driveways and investigating the use of wider gutters to better cope with heavier rainfall. We will continue to work with Local Authorities, Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency when deciding drainage solutions for our new build developments. We will continue to keep well informed of new technologies and ideas to help ensure our homes are well adapted for a changing climate. Information and advice will be provided to our staff and customers on the best ways for preparing for changing weather patterns (including over-heating and flooding). We will carry out flood risk assessments on our properties and develop a flood management plan.

3.3. Procurement

The challenge:

Yorkshire Housing uses materials, goods and services in large quantities, especially through its operations of building new homes and maintaining existing ones. These materials, goods and services potentially have a huge impact on the environment all the way through their lifecycles, e.g. pollution from mining, deforestation from logging, carbon dioxide emissions from manufacture and transportation and finally, if items can't be reused or recycled at the end of their useful lives they have to be disposed of in landfill sites or incinerated.

Our response:

Yorkshire Housing will work towards using suppliers with a demonstrable commitment to environmental sustainability, and where appropriate we will encourage local businesses to bid for work to support the local economy. We will focus initially on ensuring sustainable procurement where we have the largest expenditure: the development of new homes and the refurbishment of existing homes. We will also focus on some high profile areas, e.g. reviewing our office supplies to ensure that they are procured with sustainability in mind.

We will encourage and enable our staff to make informed decisions when buying goods or services, by developing a checklist to be used when undertaking procurement activities. This will help to ensure that we use products and services with sound environmental credentials and which comply with accredited schemes such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and, for our new build developments, in line with Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 requirements. We will also look to ensure, where possible, that products can be reused or recycled at the end of their lives and to ensure that we procure products which will last, providing good value for money.

3.4. Waste

The challenge:

Each household in the UK produces nearly half a tonne of waste each year. This does not include waste from building new homes or maintaining existing ones or from our offices and depots.

In addition many resources used to manufacture goods are finite, meaning that they could potentially run out and therefore become increasingly expensive. Recycling means that these resources can be used time and again.

Our response:

Yorkshire Housing will follow the waste hierarchy of 'Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle'. This will include striving to 'make things last', by ensuring timely repairs and preventative measures to maximise the life of elements of our homes. We will also reuse parts, where safe to do so. We will progressively work towards using less paper in our offices and facilitate the recycling of waste in all offices and depots. We will also endeavour to ensure that the waste we recycle is done so ethically.

In addition we will enable and encourage our customers to reduce, reuse and recycle their household waste.

3.5. Biodiversity

The challenge:

Biodiversity is the term used to describe the variety of life on Earth – plants, animals and their habitats. Maintaining biodiversity is important for a number of reasons. Plants capture and store CO2 so planting more trees, hedges and shrubs helps to reduce our overall environmental impact. Communities benefit from access to well-managed open spaces, which can provide physical and emotional health benefits. In addition because plants, animals and habitats are interconnected, an impact on one element can have consequences on others.

Our Response:

Almost all of our new build developments are built on brown field sites and this will in all likelihood continue in the future. We will ensure that good practice in terms of promoting biodiversity is shared between Development, Property and Neighbourhood teams.

We will promote biodiversity by protecting existing hedges and planting new native hedging plants where this is feasible to do so and we will manage and protect trees within our common areas and neighbourhoods that we are responsible for. We will not grant permission for the removal of mature trees unless there is real justification for this, and if a tree does need to be removed we will either plant another in its place or elsewhere (preferably locally). When undertaking landscaping in new build developments we will follow code for sustainable homes level 3 requirements. Elsewhere, we will select species which either have benefit to wildlife or have edible fruit.

We will encourage our staff and customers to look after green spaces in ways which benefit biodiversity, including 'grow your own' schemes and areas for wildlife and will look to develop partnerships with local authorities, charities, etc to help deliver our objectives in this area.

3.6. Transport

The challenge:

Road transport accounts for 22% of total carbon dioxide emissions in the UK. This issue relates to Yorkshire Housing across staff (commuting, work travel in own vehicles and work travel in fleet vehicles) customers, visitors and contractors.

Our response:

We will work to ensure that travel carried out by both our green [YH vehicles] and grey [staff vehicles] fleets is well managed and is as efficient as possible. We will look to reduce the number of miles that staff travel as part of their duties, for example by reducing multiple visits to outlying and rural properties, mobile and flexible working and by promoting public transport and car sharing.

3.7. Water Efficiency

The challenge:

Due to climate change and also to a growing population, it is becoming increasingly important to use water efficiently. As the water which we use is treated (a process which uses energy), using it inefficiently is not only wasteful of water but also contributes to climate change. For our customers, especially those on a water meter, it is important for them to be able to use water efficiently keeping their water bills as low as possible.

There are a number of ways that we can help customers to use less water. As a third of water used in the home is for flushing the toilet, this is a good place to start. Old style single-flush toilets use 13 litres of water per flush, whereas the new style dual flush toilets use 6 litres for the full flush and 4 litres for the reduced flush. Bathing also accounts for a large proportion of water use: a short shower can save around a third of the water used in a bath, which will save the customer money through reduced energy bills (less energy used to heat the water) and in water bills if they are on a water meter. Low flow taps cut water use by a third compared to a standard tap. (Figures from Water Wise)

Our response:

We will standardise our specification for bathrooms to ensure that we install low flow hand basin taps and low volume / dual flush WCs in all our Development, Investment and Repairs operations. We will also look to use appropriate intervention points to replace low flow hand basin taps and WC dual flush retrofit kits and also to install showers in properties.

3.8. Continuous Improvement

We will highlight examples of related good practice and encourage an environment where staff can share their ideas and experience in this area.

4. VALUE FOR MONEY

This strategy will help to reduce the energy bills of our customers, by ensuring our homes are well insulated, water efficient and have energy efficient heating systems installed. We will also provide guidance to our customers to enable them to switch energy tariffs and purchase energy in the most advantageous and economical ways.

We will aim to access at least £3 million in grant funding and subsidies, more if we can which will in turn mean that we can invest more or reduce our overall revenue investment expenditure.

5.0 SUMMARY

5.1 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on 19th November 2012, and a small number of risks and opportunities were identified which Yorkshire Housing will consider when implementing this strategy.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Lead Officer <i>Helen Amoako, Environmental Performance Co-ordinator</i>
SPONSOR <i>David Bolton, Director of Property Services</i>
CONSULTATION <i>Extensive consultation was carried out, including two consultation workshops: one to develop the content of the strategy and the second to develop the action plan. The following were involved in this process:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Development (Fraser Neasham)</i>• <i>Housing Services (Harry Manford, Suzanne Seal, Claire Tabert, Sayed Uddin)</i>• <i>Property Services (David Bolton, Helen Ryan)</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>Investment (Richard Bould, Gary Hesford, Dominic Kellett, Andy Lillywhite, Gina Sawley)</i>○ <i>Asset Planning (Helen Amoako, Francesca Bridgewater Paula Horton, Jen Smith)</i>○ <i>Home works (Michelle Cunningham, Geoff Hill, Mick Sawley, Paul Simpson, Stuart Wiseman)</i>○ <i>Repairs (Azhar Bukhari, Tony Johnson)</i>○ <i>Home Improvement Agency (Frazer Buckle, Kate Haley)</i>• <i>Resources (Gill Baker, Emma Cavanagh, Karl Hearfield, Paul Heminsley Migs Ward)</i>
SCRUTINY ROUTE: <i>Customer Services Committee (CSC) Meeting and CSC members contributed at the consultation workshops (Sean Benbow, John Bryson and Terri Ginty).</i> <i>Joint Board and CSC Meeting November 2012.</i>
AUTHORITY: <i>Board</i>
ACTION PLAN: <i>The implementation of this is to be monitored by Helen Amoako, Environmental Performance Co-ordinator.</i>
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT: <i>Completed by Helen Amoako 19.11.12</i>
LEGAL AND/ OR STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS: <i>The Climate Change Act 2008 legislates for a reduction in our carbon emissions, compared to 1990, of 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. 80% of current homes are expected to be in use by 2050, so there is a real need to improve the environmental performance of existing homes. In addition, by 2016 all new homes are required to be zero carbon.</i>
LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES: <i>This strategy links to the following strategies and policies:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Asset Management Strategy</i>• <i>Development and Disposals Strategies</i>

- *Financial Inclusion Strategy*
- *Repairs Policy*
- *Learning and Development Strategy*
- *Employment and Opportunities Strategy*

REVIEW DATE:

April 2016