

West Mercia Housing Group

Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, England



Organisation description

West Mercia Housing Group consists of four traditional housing associations (Harden, Kemble, Nexus, and Whitefriars), each retaining its own identity, Board, and staff. It was established in the early 1970s and manages 5,500 homes in the areas of Birmingham, Solihull, Herefordshire, and Worcestershire across all social housing sectors: general needs, sheltered and shared ownership etc.

Contact details

01527 556400

<http://www.wmhousing.co.uk>

Strategy

Their 'Affordable Warmth and Fuel Poverty Strategy' running alongside with computer software (Environmental Matrix for Housing) is the main framework for all staff and tenants to address the issues

A copy of their strategy can be seen through the public information exchange website 'EcoReports.co.uk'

Future Perspective

West Mercia is identifying possible pilot projects to implement renewable energy technologies or high efficiency technologies into their housing stock. West Mercia continues to look for more ways to save energy and cut residents' bills by improving those homes which qualify for special funding

Identifying and reaching energy poor

Detection focus on 'building' features

- Desk top study of building types, fuel type, running cost and usage, benefit receipt levels

Detection focus on 'occupants' situation

- Desk top study of benefit receipt levels
- Investigate where tenants are living in under-occupied dwellings

Detection which includes both 'buildings' and 'occupants'

- Aspiration to implement a full affordable warmth and environmental management system using the software 'Environmental Matrix for Housing' which measures existing levels of performance and then constructs a plan to deliver higher levels of performance against 12 areas under 4 key themes - Tenants, Housing Stock, External Relations & Management

Communications, awareness and advice

Awareness which includes both 'buildings' and 'occupants'

- Maintenance contractor consults tenants on heating/hot water/ventilation controls to be installed and provide general energy advice to all tenants

Awareness focussed on 'occupants' situation

- West Mercia propose to provide targeted individual advice to vulnerable tenants and estates
- A tenant discussion forum has been set up, and West Mercia are proposing to make energy efficiency a regular topic of discussion within the forum
- West Mercia intend to raise awareness of the Affordable Warmth scheme and provide information on energy efficiency through newsletters
- Tenants can also get involved through taking part in the development of newsletters as well as receiving newsletters, telephone panel, service area task group, work shadow, web panel, resident association, becoming a board member, scheme walkabout group member, get involved in tenant survey design, customer panel, policy reviews, and sustainability group
- Provide tenants with a link to 'Customer Focus' and other approved tariff comparison services, within newsletters, to help tenants compare tariffs, gain information on energy supplier conditions and grants
- Tenants are provided with 'Ten Energy Saving Tips'
- Encourage tenants in under-occupied dwellings to move into smaller properties
- Introduce public reporting for the organisations Affordable Warmth and Environmental Management programmes

Choice of retrofit technologies

Choice focussed on 'building' features

- Currently, West Mercia undertakes energy improvement works primarily on dwellings with low SAP ratings
- Carry out energy rating assessment of properties

- Collect energy data on a statistically representative sample of properties and individual properties
- Apply basic upgrade energy measures as part of all maintenance programmes

Choice which includes both 'buildings' and 'occupants'

- For future measures, decide on which environmental/social benefits to focus on and report on the progress

Finance

- West Mercia have used funding from energy suppliers for example EEC & CERT, in which they set up a scheme 'Warmer Homes for Winter' in which many tenants' homes were provided with external wall insulation with the aim of reducing winter heating bills
- Maximise uptake of fuel supplier grants for energy efficient measures, specifically grants for insulation

Skills and training

- West Mercia has appointed selected specialist contractors to undertake repairs and maintenance which include energy efficient measures.

Monitoring and evaluation

- West Mercia is required to provide information on its environmental performance under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, to the public in which they are to estimate reductions in carbon dioxide emissions following energy improvement measures
- Review measures being carried out in minority/one-off cases and decide which measures could be implemented across the whole housing stock and how best to do it
- They propose to investigate the idea of compiling data on void rates, transfer requests, complaints, and statutory nuisance cases etc.
- They propose to survey tenants to establish customer satisfaction following affordable warmth action