

Energy strategy development for registered social landlords

Kush Housing Association – affordable warmth strategy

Introduction

Kush Housing Association is part of the Places for People Group and currently owns and manages 900 properties in North London, providing accommodation for people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Its portfolio is dominated by ‘street’ properties and also includes a small percentage of sheltered housing.

The current affordable warmth strategy came into effect in August 2003 and has been made central to Kush’s operations; it is fuelled by enthusiasm and full of innovative ideas.

Background and drivers

Action on fuel poverty was given high priority even before the strategy made it a formal commitment. An extensive loft and cavity wall insulation programme started as early as 2002. The motivation to tackle energy issues has been self driven and independent of the larger group, Places for People. Kush’s primary driver, fuel poverty, has also been looked at from a purely financial perspective, where tenants less burdened by utility bills are more likely to pay their rent. In this respect, the strategy has proven effective with rent arrears decreasing substantially from 14 per cent to 5.7 per cent.



Kush’s relatively small size coupled with a thoroughly committed team were crucial to success

Other key external drivers have been recognised and reflected in the strategy. Local authority information requests for Home Energy Conservation Act reporting uncovered a lack of good quality and readily available data - a gap that needed to be addressed. Furthermore, changes to the Building Regulations and the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive were influencing factors with a high perceived impact on the association. The Housing Corporation’s ‘Sustainable Development Action Plan’ further stimulated the development and future upgrade of the energy strategy.

Mission, objectives and targets

Kush’s broad aim is to alleviate fuel poverty by 2010. To this end they have set five strategic objectives, each clearly explained and broken down into well-defined steps, providing a framework for the action plan.

| Strategic objectives | Targets |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop, coordinate, implement and maintain the Group’s affordable warmth strategy ▪ Promote energy efficiency advice, information and awareness ▪ Maximize customer income ▪ Carry out improvements in stock to maximise energy efficiency and address Decent Homes issues ▪ Help tenants to take advantage of the competitive supply market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All stock to have a minimum of 200 mm loft insulation by 2010 ▪ All cavity-wall properties to be insulated by 2010 ▪ All stock to achieve minimum SAP rating |

Kush intends to introduce more ambitious targets in the future to incorporate renewables and water recycling and anticipate achieving a step change in this respect if further external support is made available to them.

Governance and ownership

The strategy is fully endorsed and features a forward by the chief executive stating the long term vision for the Group. The head of housing and technical services acts as a senior level sponsor, while the housing services manager was also nominated energy co-ordinator. Effective delivery of the strategy also rests with the tenant participation officer.

Data and information

A full energy survey of the stock was completed by the end of 2003. This served as a clear baseline and enabled future monitoring of improvements. In order to maintain high data quality the energy management for housing (EMH) matrix was developed by the parent organisation, Places for People, and became a standard monitoring and management tool for many other housing associations.

Financing

Kush has allocated £500,000 to a two phase stock improvement programme focused on windows and doors. A three year partnership with Powergen under the Energy Efficiency Commitment was also established to finance energy efficiency measures (draught stripping, free CFLs, etc.). A proportion of Kush's general budget was ring fenced for affordable warmth activities. Bulk energy purchasing is aimed at keeping prices as low as possible. Similar arrangements were made for white goods procurement and further partnerships are being pursued.

Action plan and implementation

A detailed action plan is laid out in a well-structured table, following the five objective areas with a clear breakdown of specific activities. Lead officers are identified for each task and responsibility is defined as internal to Kush or that of Places for People. A clear timeline presents the key milestones.

As Kush's housing stock is relatively new, with an average age of 25 years, energy efficiency is less of an issue compared with many other housing associations managing older stock, and essential measures such as insulation are already largely in place. Kush is currently in their second phase of the window and door replacement programme. Other rolling activities include boiler replacement, heating controls and new low-energy appliances. Actions geared towards achieving high sustainability standards in new build are specified but responsibility for this lies largely with Places for People.

Communications and training

Kush Housing Association places considerable importance on tenant liaison, awareness raising and training; both the objectives and action plan demonstrate that. From tailored energy advice for tenants to internal and external training for staff, Kush is actively engaging all stakeholder groups and building up its in house capability. Central to this is the tenant participation officer, who is responsible for producing newsletters and a tenants handbook as well as organising events. Other external partners including London Borough of Hackney and energy providers were involved as well. Wide community participation is ensured through the 'Energy champions' campaign and a children's poster design competition.



Monitoring and reviewing

The strategy is reviewed regularly and is currently due for re-issue. There are both weekly and longer monthly meetings at which progress on energy issues is discussed. Progress is also overseen by Places for People on a monthly basis. Whilst the usual asset management monitoring procedures are in place, Kush considers the level of reduction of rent arrears as a measure of success along with the increase in number of inquiries from tenants requesting energy related advice or free low energy light bulbs.

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