

# Our Warm Community

A report on tackling fuel poverty through a holistic, community approach, focusing on small social housing providers.



By  
Blooming Green Ltd

 blooming green

in partnership with  
Impetus Consulting Ltd

 impetus

and funded by  
eaga Charitable Trust

eaga  
charitable  
trust 

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Origin of Our Warm Community

Our Warm Community is a project that delivered and continues to deliver support to social landlords in improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty.

In 2009, when the project was initiated, there was little ongoing work that was researching the emerging interest in utilising community action to motivate behaviour change and to deliver measures to reduce energy efficiency. Impetus Consulting was one of the first organisations to test community action in mixed tenure communities, with two projects:

- LIVE<sup>1</sup>, Low Impact Village Environments, researching community motivation in rural villages; and
- LINC<sup>2</sup>, Low Impact Neighbourhood Communities, researching the same in urban neighbourhoods.

Impetus and Blooming Green then sought to apply the same principles to social housing communities in England, with an added dimension of combining a whole house makeover approach to stock improvement. This report outlines the aims, process, results and research findings of that project.

## 1.2 Partners

### 1.2.1. Impetus Consulting Ltd

Impetus specialises in assisting organisations to maximise their potential through improving their environmental performance. It offers support to regional and local organisations to help them cut carbon emissions.

Impetus performed a steering and advisory role in the project, whilst supporting the delivery with registered social landlords.

### 1.2.2. Blooming Green Ltd

Blooming Green works with a number of organisations, supporting the people and communications aspects of social and environmental projects. It specialises in training and facilitation, qualitative evaluation and communication media.

Blooming Green provided the project lead and management, as well as development of the resources and delivery to RSLs.

### 1.2.3. eaga Charitable Trust

eaga Charitable Trust (eaga-CT) is an independent grant-giving trust that currently supports projects and research that contribute to combating fuel poverty and ensuring energy services are fair and accessible for all groups in society. The Trust has been the main provider of the funding for this project.

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<sup>1</sup> LIVE, Low Impact Village Environments, available at [www.impetusconsult.co.uk](http://www.impetusconsult.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> LINC, Low Impact Neighbourhood Communities, available at [www.impetusconsult.co.uk](http://www.impetusconsult.co.uk)

## 2 Context

### 2.1 Context at inception

As part of the funding application to eaga-CT in 2009, we provided a background summary, copied below:

*Consumer Focus estimates that there are now 5.4 million people in fuel poverty and forecasts that this figure is set to increase with the current economic climate. Whilst Government and energy suppliers work on strategies to resolve the problem, it is agreed that new approaches are required that tackle the cross-section of issues that affordable warmth raises. Although the Government has set a target for 95% of social homes to meet a 'Decent Home' standard by 2010, this is dependent on the removal of a number of barriers for social housing providers, not least tenant objections and disruption to stock improvement. The majority of RSLs still need considerable help with tenant participation and community engagement initiatives to support the removal of such barriers. Furthermore, the thermal comfort levels of the standard are reported to be inadequate to provide affordable warmth.*

*Community action is a proven method to tackling environmental issues, evident in social housing community 'tidy-up' events and in low carbon initiatives in geographical communities (as evidenced by Impetus' Low Impact Village Environment project, cited above). The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy: 6th Annual Progress Report 2008 recognises the critical need to continue to raise awareness of support available to those in or at risk of fuel poverty. The Report states that energy suppliers find it difficult to reach vulnerable customers who could benefit from social programmes. Those with access to communities, such as health practitioners, are also being encouraged to distribute information in their local communities about routes of support. As our proposed initiative looks to develop partnerships between all relevant stakeholders, it will support the action of other organisations and provide a route both to identify and to access those at risk. Defra and DECC have also recognised that community action is effective – this is reflected in the methodology they will be applying to implement the CESP programme.*

*We have received considerable support from a number of organisations. These include the Tenant Services Authority and South East England Development Agency that have expressed the need for such a project and offered support with disseminating material. In addition, a number of social landlords have shown interest in implementing an event when the action plan is available. These include Radian Housing Group and Arun District Council. The West Sussex Healthy Homes Partnership (WSHHP) is also endorsing this project, as it is fully aware of the need to educate RSLs. Only this month, WSHHP has been working with the tenants of one RSL, which has installed panel radiators into homes, immediately putting residents into fuel poverty, with one single mother spending £10 a day on a key meter for heating.*

### 2.2 Changes in the policy and economic context

Since the Coalition Government came into power in 2010, policy is in a state of flux. New Government policies are emerging and being developed, with previous Government policies now defunct. Both the housing and environmental sectors are looking towards the opportunities that will arise in the coming years and also into some of the issues that these changes may create.

The landscape has also changed in other ways. A worsening economic climate and particularly recent large increases in energy costs pose a significant risk of more people falling into fuel poverty.

Improving the uptake of measures and influencing behaviour change is increasingly being delivered by social marketing projects and the concept of community based action has also developed rapidly.

We outline below the current background to contextualise the changes made to the original project plan, the results and findings, the additional research undertaken and our recommendations for the future.

### 2.2.1. Fuel poverty

According to Consumer Focus the incidence of fuel poverty has increased significantly over the last three years. In 2007, 13% of the UK population were considered to be fuel poor. This figure had increased to 18% of the population in the 2010 statistics.<sup>3</sup>

The Government currently has no distinct policy that is set to tackle fuel poverty, despite its legally binding target to eliminate fuel poverty by 2016<sup>4</sup>. It has, however, commissioned a review of fuel poverty (the Hills Review<sup>5</sup>), which is currently reviewing the objectives of an affordable warmth policy, as well as the indicators and definition of fuel poverty. Whilst it is accepted that a review of the issue is very much needed, there is also concern that revisions of the definition will only serve to reflect a reduction in the number of fuel poor within the statistical data.

### 2.2.2. Community action

The community action based model is being tested in many projects, both in social housing and in the private sector. Initiatives are testing how community social housing projects can also in fact have a 'halo' effect on the surrounding private sector homes.

### 2.2.3. Grants and funding

Public sector funding is suffering dramatically from the current economic climate and this is already having an effect on the amount of support available to the fuel poor.

The last spending review saw a reduction in the Warm Front budget, followed by a change in the eligibility criteria<sup>6</sup>. The controls have tightened around those benefits a householder now has to be in receipt of to be eligible for the grant. In addition, their home is required to be of a SAP rating below 55. Both of these criteria have been put in place to focus the reduced budget to those who need the most help. However, efficient and cost effective heating systems are critical for those living in fuel poverty and this reduction in this particular grant stream will have an impact on the number of those being helped out of fuel poverty. Further, there is a risk that additional households will become fuel poor because they are unable to access such a support programme.

Energy supplier obligations will end in their current form in 2012 (CERT and CESP), when we will see the introduction of the ECO (Energy Company Obligation). This potential funding stream is still in development and details are unlikely to be announced before the secondary legislation stage of the Energy Bill later this year. Current thoughts are that this is being designed to support the Green Deal package for those who are vulnerable or who live in houses that may be difficult to treat (see Green Deal below).

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<sup>3</sup> [www.consumerfocus.org.uk/news/fuel-poverty-figures-should-ring-alarm-bells-for-industry-and-government-warns-watchdog](http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/news/fuel-poverty-figures-should-ring-alarm-bells-for-industry-and-government-warns-watchdog)

<sup>4</sup> 2000 Warm Homes and Conservation Act

<sup>5</sup> [www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/funding/fuel\\_poverty/hills\\_review/hills\\_review.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/funding/fuel_poverty/hills_review/hills_review.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> [www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/Energyandwatersaving/Energygrants/DG\\_10018661](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/Energyandwatersaving/Energygrants/DG_10018661)

#### 2.2.4. Green Deal

The Government's flagship programme, The Green Deal, is aimed at revolutionising the way in which energy efficiency improvements are funded. Consumers will be able to install measures, including high cost measures such as solid wall insulation, paying back the capital cost from the savings made in the electricity bill, plus a level of interest. A charge will be applied to the meter and will transfer between occupiers<sup>7</sup>.

This programme is aimed at reducing carbon emissions and, as a by-product, it may provide a means for some of those in fuel poverty to improve the energy efficiency of their home. However, it is not directly designed to tackle fuel poverty. The aim of ECO (above) is to support those who are vulnerable or who have a home that is hard to treat and this may, in turn, help the fuel poor. At this point, there is insufficient detail to comment on the extent of the potential of this programme as a means to tackle fuel poverty<sup>8</sup>.

#### 2.2.5. Decent Homes

At the end of 2010, 92% of social housing stock in the UK had achieved the Decent Homes standard<sup>9</sup>. This standard does not necessarily mean that the property is a warm or efficient to heat. There is no confirmed Government plan to go 'beyond Decent Homes'.

#### 2.2.6. HECA

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which requires local authorities to report on practicable and cost effective measure to improve the energy efficiency of all residential accommodation in their area and the progress they make in implementing measures, served to increase activity within all sectors. Developments in this legislation include the previous Government aiming to repeal the Act. The most recent news is that the Coalition Government have overturned this decision<sup>10</sup>. However, the form that the revised HECA will take is not yet known, nor how this will support those in fuel poverty.

#### 2.2.7. Minimum standards of energy efficiency

The Government has also recently announced the intention to set a minimum standard of energy efficiency to be legislated as part of the Energy Bill 2011. This will probably going to see private landlords being unable to rent out property that falls below an EPC band E from 2018 onwards. *(See our related research in Section 5.5)*

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/tackling/green\\_deal/green\\_deal.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/tackling/green_deal/green_deal.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/legislation/energybill/540-energy-security-bill-brief-energy-company.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/existing-stock](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/existing-stock)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.carbonactionnetwork.org.uk/regions\\_files/regions.php?reg=uk&sec=news\\_item&item\\_id=2011-05-11%2012:15:08](http://www.carbonactionnetwork.org.uk/regions_files/regions.php?reg=uk&sec=news_item&item_id=2011-05-11%2012:15:08)

## 3 Project Outline

### 3.1 What is Our Warm Community?

The purpose of the project was to motivate and enable registered social landlords (RSLs) to implement a holistic approach to providing affordable warmth in existing housing through a community action based makeover. It sought to combine improving the energy efficiency of housing stock, providing support to those in, or at risk of, fuel poverty and educating them about energy efficient behaviours. It provided a web-based action pack to support the landlord organisation through a process of:

- Becoming more aware of fuel poverty generally and within their own communities;
- Identifying and targeting high risk communities and individual incidents of fuel poverty;
- Providing training in energy saving measures and behaviour, identifying effective methods of community engagement/resident participation and working with vulnerable and minority groups;
- Sharing best practice via case studies, frequently asked questions and discussion forum;
- Tapping into or developing local partnerships with professionals working in health, debt management and benefit provision, etc;
- Levering in additional funding for measures or specific initiatives; and
- Facilitating the development of resident groups with a fuel poverty and energy saving focus.

As part of the project, we piloted the guidance through a programme of work with six RSLs. The objective of each RSL project was the culmination of this preparation into a focused event offering residents a menu of energy saving measures and advice across the affordable warmth spectrum. It was initially marketed as a grass-roots, 'Dunkerque spirit', community action event against rising fuel costs, in the style of a makeover documentary.

The pack, resources, training, guidance and support functions are available via the dedicated website ([www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk](http://www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk)). Direct support was also offered RSLs to help them implement the project in their communities.

### 3.2 Aims and objectives

The main aim of the project was to motivate, equip and enable RSLs to proactively reduce incidents of fuel poverty in their communities. We aimed to do this through awareness raising and education, providing an easy to follow, practical solution, engaging with residents and developing ongoing relationships and multi-agency focused partnerships.

The main objectives of the project were to:

- Develop a single resource point to:
  - Provide information on fuel poverty – the facts and its impacts;
  - Train RSLs in fundamental areas such as identifying fuel poverty, energy saving measures, behaviour change, and community engagement;

- Provide guidance on setting up facilities to deal with fuel poverty, such as internal trigger systems to deal with specific incidents;
- Provide practical support in organising the focal community event;
- Signpost to support agencies for funding, resources and related information; and
- Encourage the setting up of local affordable warmth partnerships.
- Develop a platform for RSLs to share learning, experiences and best practice; and
- Provide a focused amount of consultancy time to deal with specific queries related to the project to be shared with other RSLs and used to adapt and develop the pack.

### 3.3 Method

An initial information gathering stage brought together the current information and guidelines on multi-agency working and communicating the fuel poverty issue to vulnerable and minority groups, including debt management, health and benefit advice. At this stage the project also surveyed small housing associations to ensure that the resources developed met the needs of those it was aimed at.

Simultaneously, the website was developed to host the action pack and resources and included search engine optimisation to ensure that the site would appear in search engines for key phrases. The action pack and resource outputs were designed and uploaded.

The project was launched at a national housing association based event and significant promotion followed and continued throughout the project period to ensure awareness within the target audience.

Collaborative partnerships were sought with organisations with aims and audiences that had a link to the project to help promote and expand the support available.

Consultancy time was offered to support registered social landlords (RSLs) directly in implementing the initiative or in generally supporting their efforts to tackle fuel poverty. This was originally intended to provide a question and answer support service to a number of organisations, with priority given to those with less than 1,000 homes. There was little call on the service, so the method was adapted to proactively seek organisations with which we could test elements of the original concept.

These organisations were identified through a competition to win free one to one support in progressing their objectives in tackling fuel poverty. The support required varied from frontline housing staff training, to facilitating resident events, surveying residents and supporting strategic planning.

To evaluate the project and its outcomes, all those who had been contacted as part of the project were invited to take part in our survey. This included those to whom we had provided consultancy support, the 176 people who had downloaded resources from the website and a further 1,700 social housing contacts to whom we have sent information throughout the project.

*(Although not designed as part of the eaga-CT funded element of the project, we also took the contact for evaluation as an opportunity to add in research questions to the survey regarding recent policy announcements and emerging opportunities. The results of this research are also included later in this document.)*

# 4 Outputs

## 4.1 Outputs planned

The project sought to develop a range of resources, as detailed in the following extract from our original application.

*We will develop an action pack for landlords that will contain:*

- *Guidance in:*
  - *Identifying and targeting those in fuel poverty or at risk of it;*
  - *Communicating the issues around affordable warmth;*
  - *Communicating with vulnerable and minority groups;*
  - *Developing or tapping into local networks and partnerships;*
  - *Levering in funding;*
  - *What fuel poverty is and why it should be tackled;*
  - *Supporting individuals in fuel poverty and how to get help for them;*
  - *Setting up an internal process that is triggered and responds appropriately when an individual or group is identified as being in or at risk of fuel poverty.*
- *Training resources for maintenance and frontline housing staff in:*
  - *Basic energy efficiency measures;*
  - *How to communicate the issues of affordable warmth and energy saving behaviours;*
- *Resources for RSLs to implement the community makeover initiative, including:*
  - *A campaign plan;*
  - *Templates for promotional literature.*
- *Resources for RSLs to distribute to their residents at their final event, giving information on:*
  - *Energy saving behaviours, such as explaining heating controls;*
  - *Information on no- and low-cost measures they can implement themselves;*
  - *Information on specific larger measures, such as insulation, in order to help the RSL “sell” the product to the occupier; and*
  - *Information on how to get help from debt counsellors, health practitioners, their own housing association, etc.*

## 4.2 Outputs delivered

A range of outputs have been developed and disseminated under this project.

### 4.2.1. Website and related functions

A dedicated website has been set up for the project at [www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk](http://www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk).

This includes a number of functions including:

- A Twitter feed;
- A forum through which those involved in projects could share information and network;
- Links to support agencies, including Warmer Healthy Homes and the Home Heat Helpline.

#### 4.2.2. Action pack and support resources

The action pack was developed as both a complete toolkit, to be followed on a step-by-step basis and as 36 factsheets that could be downloaded individually, according to need and interest.

OWC Phase	Step	Resource	Document
Introduction	1	Checklist	Contents and step-by-step process list
	2	Guidance	What is Our Warm Community?
	3	Guidance	Glossary
Prepare	1	Guidance	Understanding fuel poverty
	2	Guidance	Setting your fuel poverty strategy
	3	Template	A fuel poverty strategy template
	4	Guidance	Why involve residents?
	5	Guidance	How to involve residents - an introduction
	6	Guidance	Reaching the hard-to-reach – an introduction
	7	Guidance	Reaching older people
	8	Guidance	Reaching ethnic groups
	9	Guidance	Reaching lone parents
	10	Guidance	Reaching refugees
	11	Guidance	Reaching young people
	12	Guidance	Reaching disabled people
	13	Guidance	Funding routes
Develop	1	Training	Developing questionnaires and surveys
	2	Training	Facilitation techniques
	3	Training	Identifying those at risk of fuel poverty
	4	Training	Helping residents to switch
	5	Training	Energy efficiency – the basics
Reach out	1	Guidance	Developing multi-agency partnerships
	2	Guidance	Setting up an internal trigger system
	3	Guidance	Organising a community event
	4	Template	Invitations to a community event
	5	Template	Home improvement menu options
	6	Template	Energy efficiency leaflet
	7	Template	Fuel bills explained
	8	Template	Window card to prevent switching salespeople
	9	Template	Fuel poverty co-ordinator job spec
	10	Template	Feedback questionnaire
	11	Template	Where to get more help leaflet for residents
Evolve	1	Guidance	Resident fuel poverty group
	2	Guidance	Evaluating and reporting
	3	Guidance	Fuel poverty strategy review
	4	Guidance	Referral systems

Factsheets were designed to be user friendly, providing information and signposting the user to more detailed information or support services.

These resources will continue to be offered via the website. A review of those that need updating will be carried out in the Autumn of 2011.

#### 4.2.3. Training

Training courses were developed under the programme including:

- A session for residents on how to become more energy efficient in the home; and
- Bespoke training for frontline housing staff, designed around the needs of each organisation that requested it.



#### 4.2.4. Research report

In addition to this project report and the evaluation, a short report has been drafted to be disseminated to policy influencers. This forms the findings from our recent research with social landlords on their attitude towards energy efficiency, fuel poverty, the energy efficiency level of stock and their views on the opportunity that Green Deal will provide.

#### 4.2.5. Case studies

Case studies have been developed detailing the experiences of six organisations involved in fuel poverty and/or energy efficiency projects. These have been disseminated to all those on our mailing list, as well as uploaded to our website.

#### 4.2.6. Future resources

Our work with some social housing providers continues (beyond the elements funded by eaga Charitable Trust). We have developed a resident survey primarily designed to gather background information before facilitating a project within a specific social housing community. It will also introduce residents to the concept of the project, identify potential opportunities, both in measures and in encouraging residents to become the drivers or energy champions within their own community. This survey, plus anonymised results and any additional literature developed, will be added to the website downloads in September 2011.

Our continuing work includes facilitating a strategic session with managers and a working group within a small housing association. Both a case study and a copy of the resulting policy and action plan will become available on the website in the Autumn. (This work is being funded by Blooming Green Ltd with volunteer time support to the project.)

## 5 Research on attitudes and opportunity

Whilst contacting social landlords to evaluate the project, we took the opportunity of including a number of questions to investigate:

- The current status of stock;
- Attitudes to residents in fuel poverty;
- The potential impact of a legislated minimum standard; and
- Awareness and acceptance of the Green Deal opportunity.

These results are based on the on-line survey responses from 34 organisations, with 26 of those providing information on stock levels.

(As an observation it has been easier to engage with housing providers based on the information requested above than by offering a grant funded service. Visits to the website have peaked during the evaluation and research period, rather than at any other time of the project. This may be due to the recent sharp increase in energy costs, increasing awareness of the need to tackle the fuel poverty issue.)

### 5.1 Organisation size

Of those that responded 38% owned more than 1000 properties, with the remaining organisations owning an average of 258 units each. (For the purposes of this research, we use this as the criteria to differentiate between large and small landlords.)

In some of our findings this is used to compare the experience within small and large housing associations. (Small housing associations own 16% of the social housing market<sup>11</sup> and therefore provide a good opportunity for reducing carbon emission and improving the lives of those in fuel poverty.)

### 5.2 Staff engaged

Our survey requested the job title of the respondent.

- Those that responded from small organisations varied from Clerk to the Trustees, Administration Officers, through to Trust Managers and Chief Executives.
- Those that responded from large organisations were predominantly officers responsible for financial inclusion, energy efficiency or affordable warmth.

This highlights an issue within small housing associations, that there is often no one person responsible for this agenda. This means that it is up to the individuals within that organisation to have an interest or intention in energy efficiency or fuel poverty before action is likely to be taken. It also makes it difficult for support organisations (as we found in Our Warm Community) to reach the relevant person within an organisation to target support.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/ehs200910householdreport](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/ehs200910householdreport) and TSA's Regional Unit Breakdown by size 2009.

## 5.3 Attitude towards fuel poverty

Respondents were asked for their top three reasons as to why a resident may be in fuel poverty and were given the following answer options:

- Residents are generally on a low income.
- Homes are not energy efficient.
- Residents spend money on other, non-essential things.
- The cost of energy is very high.
- Existing heating systems are expensive to run.
- Residents are not maximising on welfare benefits.
- Residents don't know how to use their heating controls properly.

It is not surprising that all respondents gave their top two reasons as 1) residents are generally on a low income and 2) the cost of energy is high. Responses on other reasons were also similar between the large and small organisations. The sample group combined indicated that there was also a priority to:

- Tackle the poor energy efficiency in homes;
- Improve heating systems; and
- Educate residents in how to use heating controls.

This is interesting in that all three of these elements have the potential to be tackled by the landlords themselves.

The only marked difference between the responses from those in large housing associations and those in smaller organisations is in the number of people that attributed the cause of fuel poverty to be the fault of the resident. None of those in the larger organisation, in specific fuel poverty or energy efficiency role, considered this to be a factor. However, in small organisations 13% of respondents attributed resident spending money on other, non-essential things as one of their top three causes of fuel poverty.

This evidence is not based on a large survey sample and therefore does not necessarily give a comprehensive view of the general attitude in smaller organisations. However, it may indicate that those who are not in a specific energy role and therefore may well have less knowledge of the issue, do not see fuel poverty as their responsibility to tackle but that of the fault of the resident.

## 5.4 Current activity

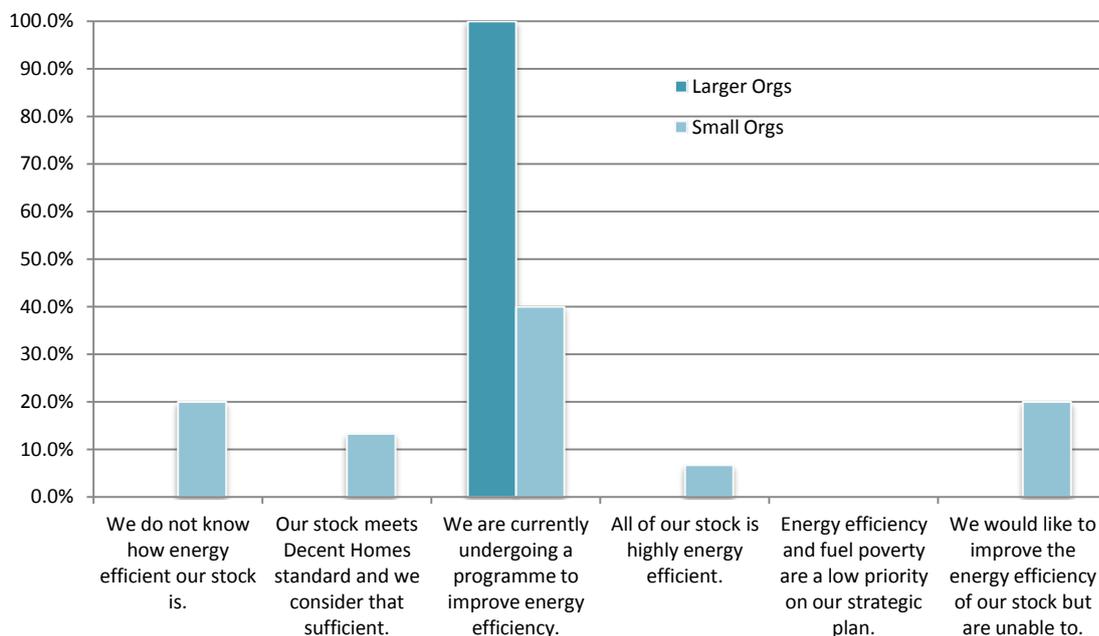
There is a stark difference between the current or planned improvement activity reported by large organisations and that of smaller organisations.

As can be seen by the graph below, all of the large organisations are undergoing some form of programme to save energy in homes, compared to only 40% of the smaller organisations. Those that are not implementing projects give the following reasons:

- They do not know how energy efficient the stock is\*;
- They are unable to implement projects due to specific barriers; or
- Stock meets the Decent Homes standard, which is considered sufficient.

(\*Our initial thought was that this may be related to the role of the individual who responded and who may not be in possession of specific organisational information. However, each of these

respondents is in a managerial role, responsible either for housing or asset management, suggesting that there is generally lack of information and understanding at an organisational level.)



One organisation reported having highly efficient stock that would not require any further improvement.

Two main barriers prevent small organisations from implementing fuel poverty or energy efficiency programmes when there is an interest to:

- Stock is grade listed or in a conservation area; or
- The property is too complex to treat because of the leaseholder/freeholder relationship.

However, the lack of knowledge in smaller organisations is a contributing factor, with 20% of respondents not aware of the level of energy efficiency in their stock. This is also supported by the kind of help that respondents request later in the research.

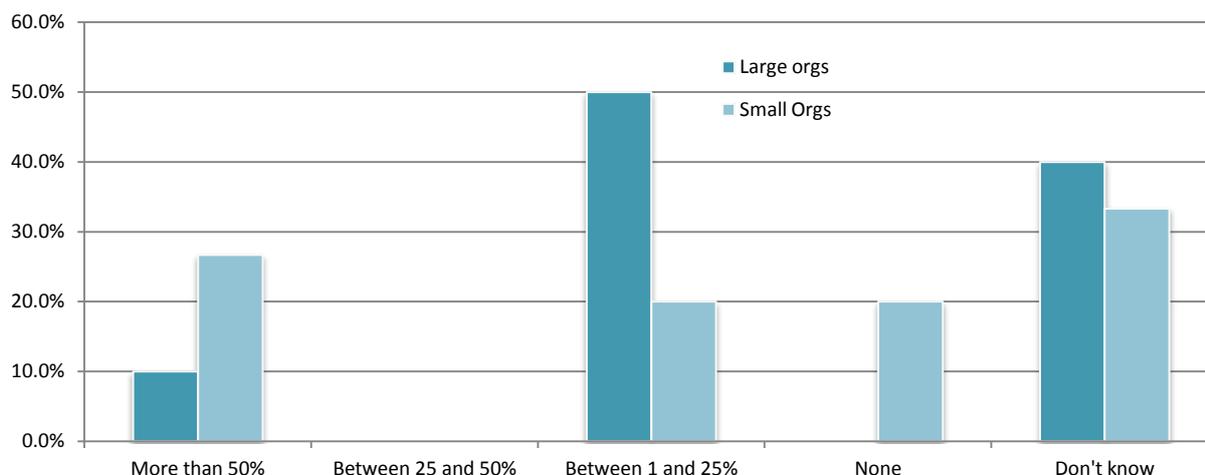
It should also be noted that those responding were self-selecting and that this is a sample of those who had some interest in the topic already. We are unable to ascertain what proportion of small housing associations still have no interest or awareness in the issues.

## 5.5 Minimum standards

The Government is currently legislating to introduce minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector, using the EPC rating E as a minimum requirement. The next question asked social housing providers to consider the potential impact if the same standards were to be applied in the social housing sector.

*The Government has recently announced the intention to mandate a minimum standard of energy efficiency in private rented housing. If all rented homes had to have an EPC rating of E or above, how much stock would you need to update?*

The following graph compares the condition of property reported by those in large organisations and those in small organisations.



Looking at all of the organisations who responded:

- Only 10% of those surveyed were able to state that all of the properties would be at or above a minimum standard level of E (EPC rating);
- A third did not know (and respondents mainly had roles such as asset managers); and
- Over 20% of respondents reported that over half of their stock would need to be upgraded.

To examine this further, we have cross referenced the responses with the size of the asset register of each respondent. We estimate that there are approximately 32,000 homes within this survey group (from both large and small organisations) that are currently rated as an F or G rating. (This equates to 13% of the assets of all respondents.)

This may be a conservative estimate as:

- We only applied the lowest percentages within each range; and
- 33% of all organisations were not able to report on EPC ratings of their stock.

The English House Condition Survey (2009) reports that approximately 10% of social housing has stock that is rated as an F or G on the EPC<sup>12</sup>. This equates to nearly 400,000 homes in England alone.

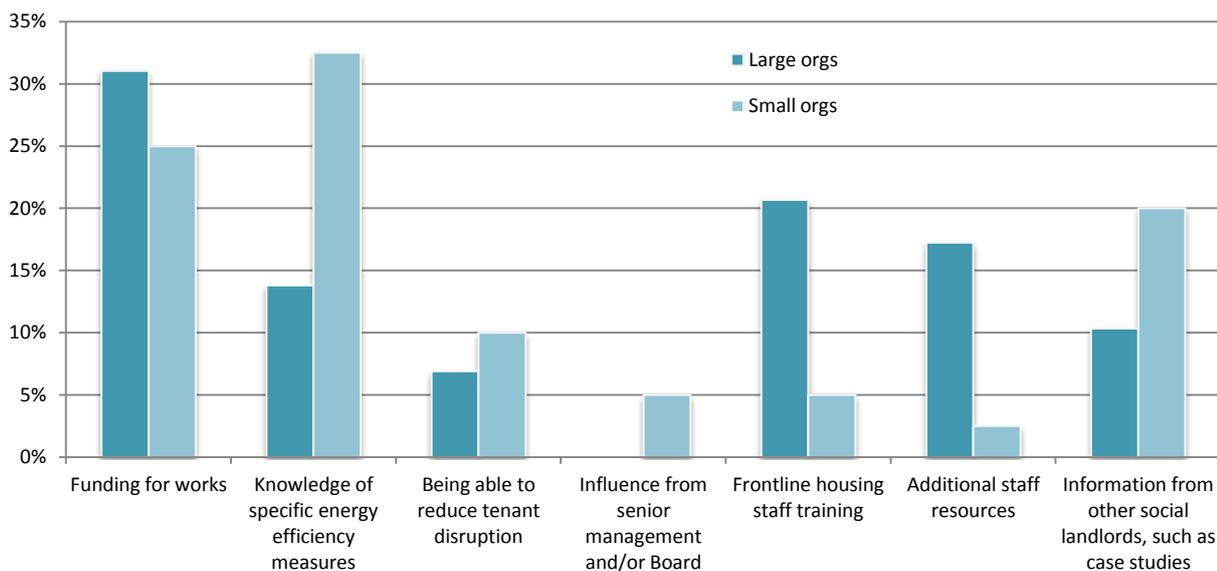
It is widely accepted that minimum standards set at this level will have an impact on the private rented sector. However, these figures indicate that there is a significant amount of social housing stock that falls below what is now considered as an acceptable level of energy efficiency.

## 5.6 Support required

Respondents were then asked what support they currently require in order to improve the energy efficiency of stock and help those in fuel poverty.

Again, there was a marked difference in the responses from large organisations and those in smaller organisations.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1133548.pdf>



The top three priorities for those in larger organisations were tangible resources:

- 1 Funding;
- 2 Training for frontline housing staff; and
- 3 Additional staff resources.

In comparison, knowledge and information are the priorities for smaller organisations, namely:

- 1 Knowledge (over and above a need for funding)
- 2 Funding; and
- 3 Information.

In response to the question of what tangible support could be best provided for them:

- Large organisations primarily reported to need training for frontline staff. This is also supported by the response to our one-to-one offer of consultancy, where training was the most required element.
- Small housing associations would like to learn from the experience of others through their own network, regional events and case studies.

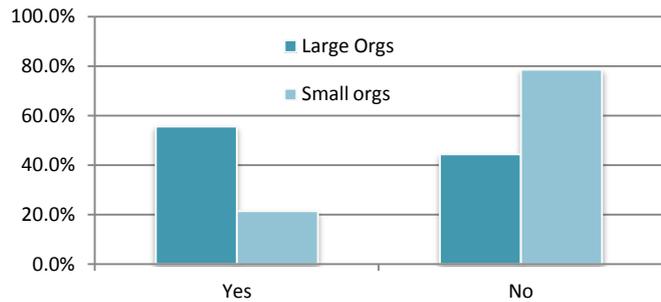
## 5.7 Funding and Green Deal

It is appearing more and more likely that social housing will play a large part in facilitating the delivery of Green Deal. It is seen as a way of developing the supply chain and, with the 'halo' effect in communities, being able to influence owner occupiers in private sector housing.

We asked survey participants the following question. *The Government is currently legislating to introduce a scheme in 2012 (the Green Deal) that will allow you to borrow money for measures to improve energy efficiency. The repayments would be made from the savings made by tenants in their energy bills. In principle, does this sound like an initiative that would help you to improve energy efficiency?*

Just over half of those in large organisations were accepting of the potential opportunity that Green Deal provides.

The large proportion of those in small housing associations did not see that opportunity.



This may be due to a number of factors:

- Funding, although a major issue, is not the primary support that they report they need.
- It is also possible that those in larger organisations are more aware of the 'pay as you save' concept and have more knowledge of the development of Green Deal, thereby more accepting of the future programme potential.

Six organisations have requested additional information on Green Deal and we will be providing a briefing note shortly.

We also asked housing providers who had made or were in the process of making any energy efficiency improvements to stock, how they had funded the measures.

- 88% of large organisations had accessed some kind of grant funding, mainly CERT or CESP.
- Only 33% of small organisations had utilised grant funding, with the remaining 67% self financing works.

## 5.8 Research summary

There is a marked difference between the stock status, the motivation and attitude, as well as in levels of knowledge when comparing large and small social housing organisations. Large organisations have generally matured and evolved in recent years, learning, experimenting and implementing programmes to improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty.

This research indicates that smaller housing associations are significantly behind in this process:

- Those organisations that responded are aware of the issues but, in general, do not have sufficient knowledge to take action or know what solutions are available to them;
- We are unable to ascertain how many small housing associations are not aware of the risk of fuel poverty in their residents, nor in how they could be able to help.
- Because of this they may not be open to potential solutions, particularly those that are more innovative, such as the Our Warm Community project or the potential of Green Deal;
- Attitudes still exist that lay the fault of fuel poverty with the resident;
- They do not have a dedicated resource with an energy efficiency or fuel poverty role; and
- They have a higher percentage of stock that falls below an acceptable energy efficiency level (E rating on an EPC).

This research supports the results of the Our Warm Community evaluation that small housing associations are not yet ready for a programme that provides practical support and that work is required in raising awareness and educating in the benefits and actions that can be taken to make a difference.

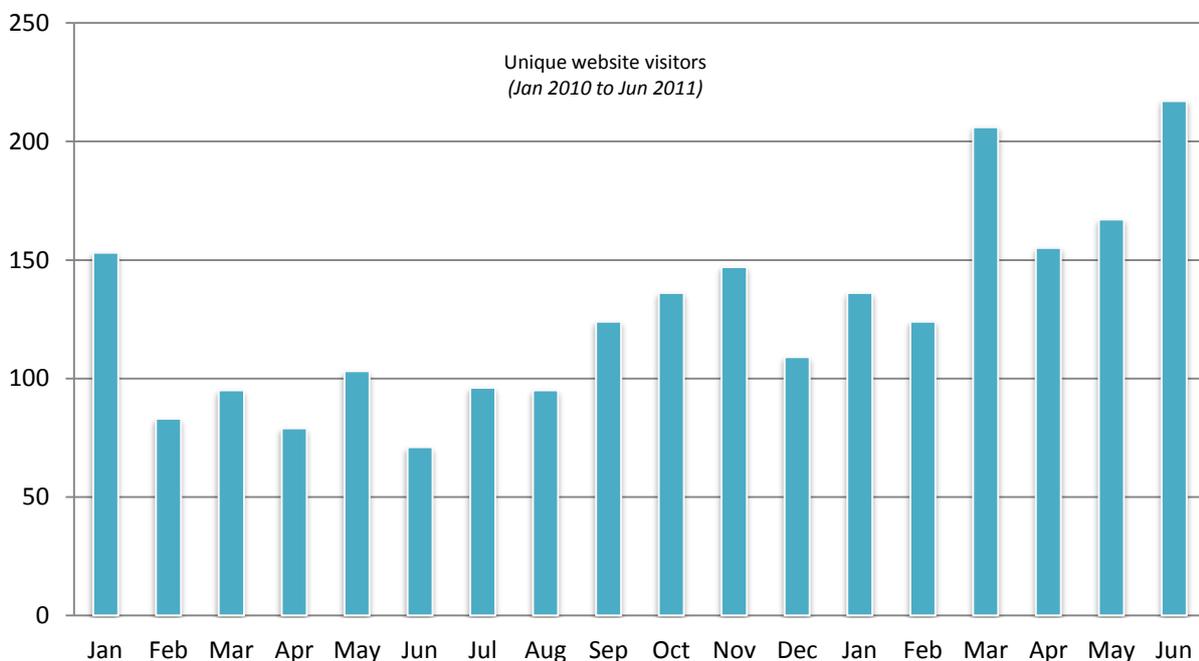
## 6 Results and findings

The statistics quoted in this chapter are based on our web analytics and records of events and promotion activities carried, as well as on the responses of representation from 42 organisations. These include those who received one-to-one consultancy time, those who downloaded resources and our full contact mailing list (that had not engaged with the project).

These resulted in 31 submissions to our online survey questionnaire, eight telephone interviews and three face to face interviews.

### 6.1 Statistics

- The project interacted with 1700 people on our contact mailing list.
- 176 people downloaded resources.
- To date there have been 2,296 unique visitors to the website.
- We have exhibited at two national conferences and exhibitions; the National Housing Federation's Small Housing Association Conference and the Carbon Action Network Conference (previously HECA).
- We have also presented the project and its developments at three conferences, including Sustainable Homes SHIFT Conference in 2010.
- We have worked directly with six organisations to effect projects and develop case studies.
- 27 frontline housing staff have been trained.



## 6.2 Usefulness of resources

### 6.2.1. Action pack

84% of those who responded to our survey (having also downloaded resources) reported that the resources had been useful in furthering work on energy efficiency and fuel poverty. However, it appears that those that downloaded resources were those already involved in this area of work, looking for additional guidance or information.

The resources most downloaded were those that offered guidance in involving residents.

### 6.2.2. One to one support

Four of the six organisations with whom we worked directly considered that staff training in identifying fuel poverty and in the basics of energy efficiency concepts was a key requirement.

Feedback from those that received this support was that the training was both of high quality and would provide practical use back in the workplace, helping frontline staff to identify and help those in fuel poverty.

We have facilitated two community events, both of which were well received and considered very useful by attendees.

The project has influenced the affordable warmth strategies and action plans of two organisations.

### 6.2.3. Platform for information sharing

Visitors to the website did not engage with the forum. Only one of those that registered on the website attempted to use this function. We believe this is a symptom of the lack of direction and knowledge that small housing association staff in this topic; they do not have specific questions to ask others but do need to be inspired, motivated and influenced by others, leading to requiring further information.

Both the website and the forum will remain available until a review in 2013.

## 6.3 Quantifying carbon savings or impact on fuel poverty

Although the evaluation was not originally specified to report on the impact of installed measures or impact on fuel bills, it was hoped that our involvement at a deep level with organisations and communities would allow us to put these mechanisms in place in each individual project.

The project was unable to sufficiently influence organisations to implement the full project (detailed later in our findings) and we were therefore unable to quantify this element of impact.

## 6.4 Individual RSL projects

The research into and the consultancy support provided to individual organisations' projects yielded its own results, contributing to our overall findings.

### **The Ealing and Brentford Consolidated Charity (EBCC)**

EBCC was keen to 'do the right thing' for its tenants on energy provision but as a small housing association, they had no in-house expertise regarding energy efficiency measures.

This lack of knowledge has resulted in key opportunities to cut carbon and/or fuel bills being missed. For example, the organisation replacing a gas fired district heating system with electric storage heaters, believing the latter to be a better option for their tenants. When specifying gas boilers, no consideration had been given to ensuring the boilers had easy to use controls that were appropriate for the organisation's elderly tenants.

Similarly, the organisation recommended to its tenants that they stick with their original provider; we found that some of their tenants could be saving more than £300 a year by changing provider. Ealing and Brentford had no idea that potential savings could be so high and were happy to change their advice.

### **York Housing Association**

This organisation already had a commitment to tackle energy efficiency and fuel poverty from the senior management team and this had a positive effect on the general culture of the organisation in terms of its awareness, attitude and receptiveness to tackling the issues. Staff also had a very respectful and caring attitude towards tenants, as well as a genuine desire to help them with being able to pay their energy bills and keep warm and well.

Even with all this groundwork, they did, however, need an external influence to help shape this into a tangible action plan and to increase knowledge in *how* to help residents.

### **Barnsbury housing Association**

Barnsbury approached Our Warm Community for support in training resident energy champions. We worked with them to design both a resident training event and a session for training frontline housing staff.

A change in leadership, through the resignation of the Chief Executive, influenced the organisation's priorities and this resulted in the longer term plans being put on hold. (We were able to signpost residents to a local community green group and those residents interested were able to find out more about energy saving.)

This highlights the need for senior management and trustee boards to be engaged in this issue.

### **Worthing Homes**

The project also met with the RELISH<sup>13</sup> steering group to investigate ways of supporting their ongoing work in engaging residents in saving energy. This project highlights how by combining resident education, even just with low or no cost measures, significant fuel bill savings can be made.

### **Riverside Housing Association and Thirlmere Housing Co-operative**

Although Our Warm Community was primarily designed to research small housing associations, we were interested to investigate whether large organisations had a part to play in influencing and supporting others. Riverside approached us as the managing agent for a number of small communities.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.relish.org/phase1.html>

Their influence on one of these co-operatives had a direct result in that co-operative becoming engaged in the topic. They did this by identifying two residents as local drivers and potential community champions and by presenting their views and ideas to the management board.

The Thirlmere Co-operative is pleased to be able to take this agenda forward with their community and this appears to have had a positive effect on the relationship between the Committee and the Managing Agent in taking this forward. They have required little support or encouragement to take this project on board.

Riverside will be rolling this support out to other co-operatives in the Mersey area.

This suggests that large organisations do not need significant budgets or resources to influence those smaller housing associations within their sphere of influence and there is potentially a large opportunity for motivating and enabling small housing associations through this route.

## 6.5 Key findings

**This project has highlighted that small housing associations are significantly behind their larger counterparts in their awareness, knowledge and understanding the fuel poverty issue, as well as the solutions available to them and the benefits of tackling it.**

**They desperately need some hand holding if they are to provide their tenants with the energy efficiency measures and advice they need to avoid being in fuel poverty. Whilst the 'Our Warm Community' plugs a gap in the provision of information, most small housing associations need some more focused support to get a fuel poverty alleviation programme underway.**

The project has been successful in motivating and enabling some social landlord organisations in tackling energy efficiency and fuel poverty by providing the catalyst to instigating and focusing projects. However, it is the offer of direct consultancy support that has provided that catalyst, and then generally only where interest already exists, rather than the provision of a toolkit offering a simple step by step approach for organisations to follow.

The resources proved useful for larger housing associations to support existing initiatives, with specific training and knowledge documents being those most downloaded and used. Resources were downloaded by officers at practitioner level and were 'cherry picked' according to their own status and needs at the time. Again, these provided support to those who were already engaged or about to be engaged in an initiative.

The concept of combining measures and education in a holistic approach proved too intimidating for small housing associations, where they reported:

- Knowledge of the issues and solutions being too low to commit to take action; and
- Resources being in short supply, particularly in having dedicated officers or volunteers.

The holistic concept also proved too ambitious for larger organisations but for different reasons. Staff reported that within large organisational structures combining resident education, funding for measures and training frontline staff simultaneously proved too complex when instigated from an external source. Since the inception of Our Warm Community, other combined education and

building fabric improvement projects have been successful but these have developed organically within the organisation.

Smaller housing associations reported that knowledge was the main barrier to initiating energy efficiency and fuel poverty, over and above that of funding issues. Despite stating this as a barrier, they did not utilise the resources on the website but provided feedback that they need more proactive intervention and facilitated knowledge sharing events and networks.

Our conversations with most staff from small housing associations indicate that there is still a considerable amount of work required in communicating the issue of fuel poverty, the solutions available and the benefits to those responsible for staff welfare and asset management within these organisations.

## 7 Recommendations

These recommendations are designed to respond directly to the issues raised in this project, as well as to the explicit requests from respondents to our survey.

### 7.1 Network development

Knowledge and information sharing have appeared as key issues throughout the project, yet it has been difficult to engage with those who are interested in the topic within small housing associations to provide them with that knowledge and information.

There is a need, as explicitly identified by respondents to our survey, for a proactive network of small organisations that actively raises awareness, encourages and enables the sharing of information.

A network developed by those housing associations already engaged in the topic is likely to be in a better position to build membership through existing contacts. We recommend that funders and other organisations should look to proactively provide this support.

### 7.2 Events

Respondents in our survey also requested that support organisations should hold events regionally; staff and volunteers are unlikely to travel far to national conferences because of the time and cost constraints unless the organisation or individual is both already fully committed to the agenda and financially able to do so.

These events must be tailored directly to provide access for small organisations if they are to open their existing support networks and facilities to small housing associations.

### 7.3 Mentoring

Our case studies of Riverside Housing and the Thirlmere Co-operative shows the impact that a larger organisation can have over the smallest communities and housing associations. Riverside, with the support of Our Warm Community, were able to provide a catalytic role in encouraging action within a community of 50 houses, without significant time or cost expense.

We recommend that further research be undertaken to investigate the opportunities and barriers to developing a mentoring programme between individuals within different kinds of organisations, particularly where large landlords are providing management services to small communities or co-operatives.

### 7.4 Support agencies and organisations

There are a number of ways in which organisations that communicate and work with small housing associations could support needs further by tailoring services, events and communications directly to the needs of small organisations. For example, although some have events tailored towards small organisations, their design is not always conducive to the nature and culture.

We recommend that support bodies seek to:

- Provide local or regional events as annual, national conferences can be time consuming or expensive to travel to;
- Support projects that are tailored to the needs of officers, trustees or volunteers in small housing associations (these needs are highlighted in our findings as knowledge and information); and
- Tailor proactive communications to meet the needs of small housing associations.

## 7.5 Research

We recommend that further research is undertaken to consider the opportunities and barriers to the uptake of Green Deal by tenants of smaller housing associations and access to ECO. This should include investigating the potential for smaller housing association to become proactively involved in Green Deal delivery.

## 7.6 Policy recommendations

### 7.6.1. Energy efficiency standard for social housing

By the end of 2010, 92% of social homes achieved the Decent Homes Standard<sup>14</sup> and there is an assumption that this means that most social homes have been improved. Whilst this may be the case it does not mean that the majority of social homes are energy efficient, as the guidance only provides a proxy SAP rating of 35. This level of SAP rating is considered to be wholly inadequate by a number of organisations, including the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health and National Energy Action<sup>15</sup>.

This skewed view is compounded by landlords and Government quoting 'average' SAP ratings for the sector. We must take into account that there is a number of larger organisations developing new property with very high SAP ratings and 'eco-homes'. An average SAP figure across the nation therefore distracts from those homes that are at the other end of the scale.

Our survey posed a scenario to social housing providers, whereby the same minimum standards would be applied to social housing as is proposed in the private rented sector. (Respondents were asked how many of their homes would not achieve a minimum standard of E under the EPC rating.) From the findings, it is clear that many social homes currently fall short of this standard. This is also supported by the English House Condition survey<sup>16</sup>, which reports that around 10% of social housing currently has an F or G rating (with a SAP less than 38).

**Recommendation:** That Government sets a minimum standard for energy efficiency to be set in the social housing sector, either by applying the same rules as are proposed for private rented sector, through the EPC rating, or by developing a Decent Homes Plus standard, with a minimum energy efficiency level.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/existing-stock>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/60/60i.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1133548.pdf>

**Recommendation:** All social housing providers should be required to report on energy efficiency levels of stock and this information should be publicly available.

### 7.6.2. Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

The developing policy around the supplier obligation ECO looks to exclude social housing tenants from being able to access support for affordable warmth, as social tenants will be ineligible for the affordable warmth element of the ECO. Social tenants will only be able to access the ECO support under the carbon emissions reductions element of the scheme if it does not pass the 'golden rule' because it is hard to treat.

This will exclude those that live in social housing with a low SAP rating that have not already had basic energy efficiency measures installed, such as cavity wall or loft insulation. Our research on the minimum standards scenario implies that there could be a significant number of people who fall into this category.

The Government lists one of the main objectives of the ECO as 'supporting an equitable Green Deal'. Unless those who are not in hard to treat homes can access the support, it is not equitable and Government should look at providing support for social homes that fall into this category. This is particularly unfair as ECO is a fuel surcharge paid by all, including those in low incomes and those in social housing. Those who are low energy users, in fuel poverty, will only be able to access support if their home is hard to treat. High energy users who may or may not be in fuel poverty are more likely to prove attractive to a Green Deal provider and will meet the golden rule criteria.

**Recommendation:** That the eligibility criteria for the affordable warmth element of ECO should include those in social housing.

### 7.6.3. Green Deal Providers

We are aware that a number of larger social housing providers are investigating whether becoming a Green Deal Provider is viable. These organisations are likely to have social and environmental motives, in addition to their commercial objectives, and may well therefore provide an opportunity for smaller housing association and their tenants to access Green Deal finance.

**Recommendation:** That emerging policy enables social housing Green Deal providers to finance packages for those across all sectors. Furthermore they should be encouraged or incentivised to connect with small housing associations to provide an access route to Green Deal funding.

### 7.6.4. Green Deal Advice Centre

Whilst there are few details known of what this service will provide, this body may provide a route through which small housing associations can access Green Deal for their residents.

**Recommendation:** That this option is considered in the development of this programme.

# Our Warm Community

[www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk](http://www.ourwarmcommunity.org.uk)

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