

Providing Choice



Addressing Inequalities



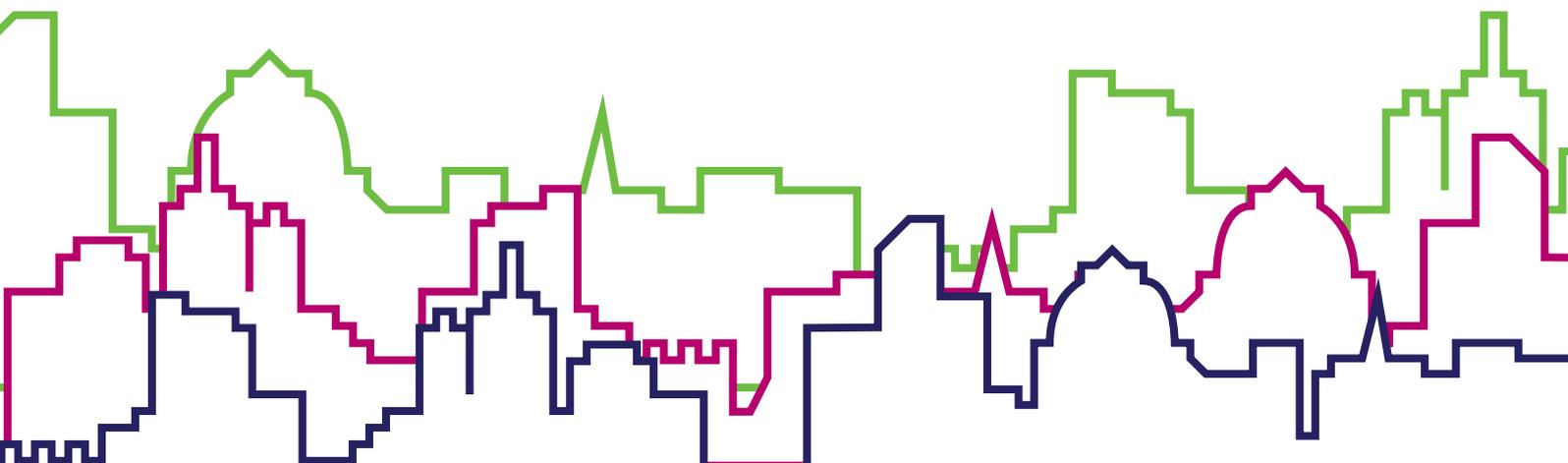
Improving Life Opportunities



Affordable Warmth Strategy

Fighting Fuel Poverty

Unity Housing Association is an organisation committed to providing housing choice, improving life opportunities and addressing inequalities



Our Mission & Values



Our Mission:

To provide housing choice, improve life opportunities and address inequalities

Our Values

Integrity - being honest, transparent and sincere with strong principles

Respect - in the way we treat people, service users and each other

Flexible - in how we work for the benefit of our tenants, other people, the organisation and each other

Equality - in the way we work and deliver our services

Commitment - to provide services to meet the needs of our tenants, local people and local neighbourhoods

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1. Introduction

1.1 What is Fuel Poverty?

At a time of high heating costs and concerns about sustainable fuel supplies 'Affordable Warmth' is an important issue for Unity Housing Association, in its work around the provision of high quality housing and related services, which respond to the needs of our current customers, communities and neighbourhoods.

1.1.2 The most widely accepted definition of fuel poverty is a household that 'needs to spend more than 10% of its total income on fuel' (Department of Energy and Climate Change - www.decc.gov.uk) to maintain an adequate standard of heating. In 2001, the Government published a report which identified that an adequate standard of heating is that to a level of warmth that is consistent with maintaining health and wellbeing; twenty one degrees centigrade in the main living areas and eighteen degrees centigrade in other areas of the home.

1.1.3 There is no clear and definitive way to identify if a household is suffering from fuel poverty, rather, a variety of factors interact to create this situation. The Department of Energy and Climate Change suggest that the most important factors to consider in the identification of those who are suffering from fuel poverty, are the combined effects of:

- Energy inefficient homes and difficult to heat properties
- The high cost of energy and expensive to run heating systems
- Low income

1.1.4 Our strategy aims to ensure that all of our customers can maintain and achieve healthy and comfortable temperatures, in their homes, at a reasonable cost.

1.2 Consequences Of Fuel Poverty

1.2.1 Health

One of the fundamental consequences of Fuel poverty is the detrimental effect a cold environment can have on one's health. The lower the temperature and the more inactive the occupants, the more serious the effect the cold will have. Ill health can be increased by cold homes.

1.2.2 Quality Of Life

The need to spend more on heating may reduce what can be spent on dietary needs or social expenses. It can also exacerbate any social isolation felt by residents and diminish one's quality of life as individuals may not be able to afford to go out and/or they may be reluctant to invite friends into their cold homes. This may contribute to the social exclusion of individuals and families, consequently reducing the quality of their lives.

1.2.3 Financial Hardship

Fuel Poverty can add to the financial hardship of the household which, again in turn, may affect the quality of life of the resident(s). What is of particular concern is the fact that fuel poverty is a specific problem which unevenly affects those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those who live in poor quality homes with inadequate heating and/or inefficient and uneconomical heating systems.



2. Green Agenda

2-1 Currently most sources of energy, within the home, derive from unsustainable fuel sources such as natural gas and coal. As the charges from fuel suppliers are increasing and supplies are dwindling, renewable energy has become an important issue for organisations, such as Unity, to consider.

2-2 Renewable energy is a source of energy that is inexhaustible and capable of replenishing itself. It benefits the environment in respect of its sustainability and benefits the individual as it may significantly reduce the cost of fuel for the occupier.

2-3 What are the benefits of renewable energy?

- Minimises the use of non-renewable fossil fuel
- Reduces local air pollution
- Provides a clean source of energy
- Reduces fuel costs for the user
- Reduces carbon dioxide emissions

2-4 Unity Housing is committed to considering renewable energy technologies for the benefit of the organisation's customers and the benefits of the wider environmental agenda of reducing carbon footprints.

3-3 The socio-economic characteristics of Unity customers may put them at a higher risk of being categorised as fuel-poor households. Fuel poverty mainly affects older people, lone parents, the unemployed, the sick and the disabled who often have to heat their homes for the longer periods of time than those who are in full-time employment. These groups are also more likely to use pre-payment meters. It is suspected that Unity has a high proportion of residents who are using pre-payment meters. Those using such meters can be considered to be at an additional disadvantage as paying for fuel via this method is considerably more expensive than payments via a quarterly bill.

3-4 Accordingly, as part of Unity Housing's commitment to responding and supporting the needs of our current customers in addition to providing high quality housing, the ability to tackle and promote Affordable Warmth remains a fundamental concern of the organisation. The implementation of this strategy will also improve and develop the organisation's reputation amongst its peer group, respond to customer needs and link in with the wider government agenda.

3-5 Furthermore, improving energy efficiency of all Unity homes has the multiple benefit of assisting the reduction of CO₂ emissions which in turn links in to the wider green agenda.

3. Why Does Unity Need An Affordable Warmth Strategy?

3-1 An Affordable Warmth Strategy is required to help alleviate fuel poverty and ensure that affordable warmth is available for all Unity customers. This is especially important given the austere economic climate we are living in and because of the rising cost of fuel.

3-2 Affordable Warmth has been advanced at a national policy level with the publication of the Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy that seeks to ensure that no person in England should have to live in fuel poverty, as far as is practicable, with a target date of 2016.



4. Profile Of Unity Housing Stock

4-1 Unity Housing is currently managing an expanding portfolio of approximately 1100 properties throughout Leeds. The properties are diverse in respect of locality, dwelling type and in respect of their energy efficiency. The properties range from new build developments which are sustainable homes rated code 4, though to older miscellaneous Victorian properties which are difficult to insulate, expensive to heat and consequently often recognised as being poor in terms of energy efficiency.



4-2 Energy Performance

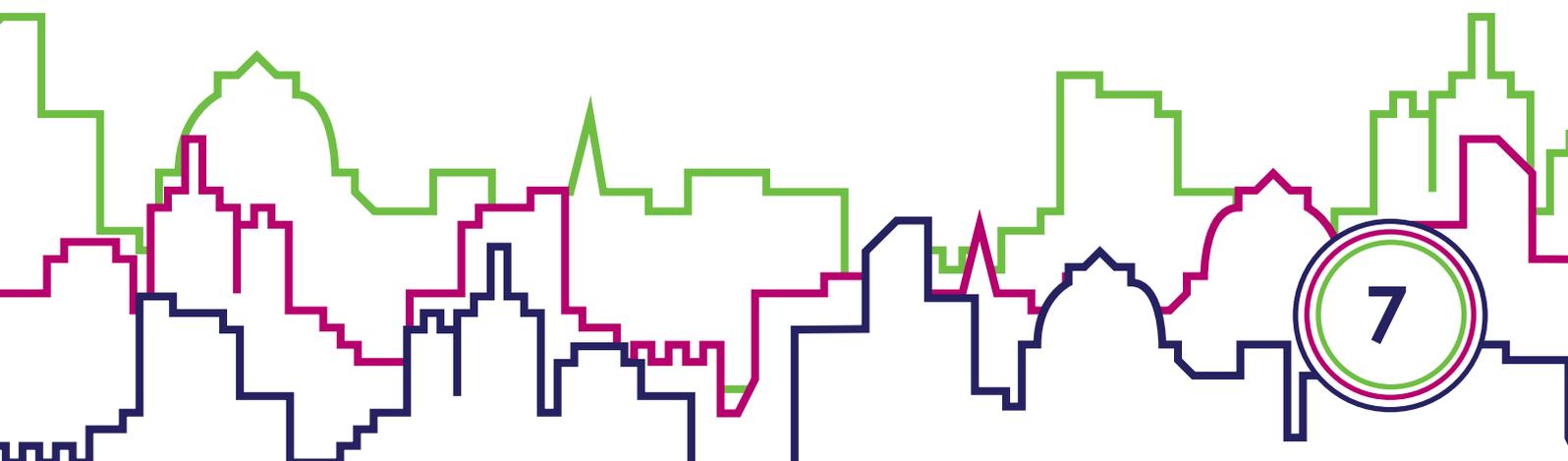
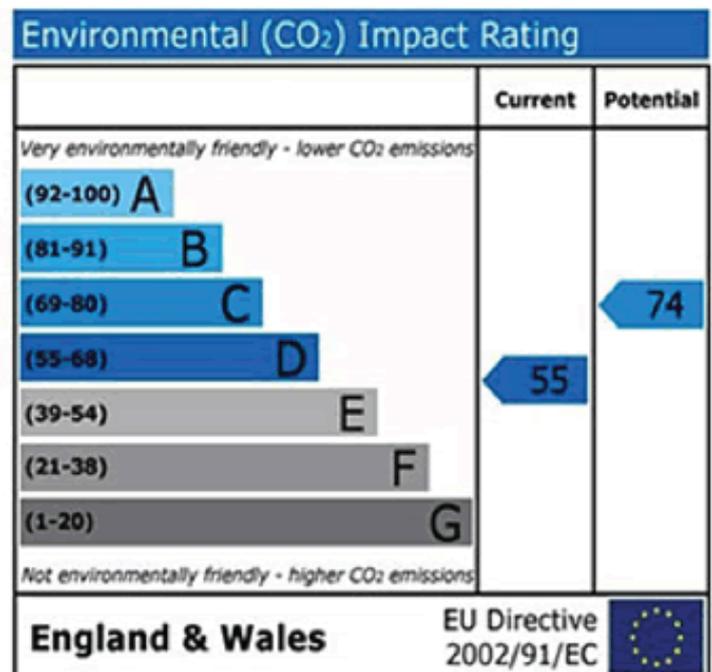
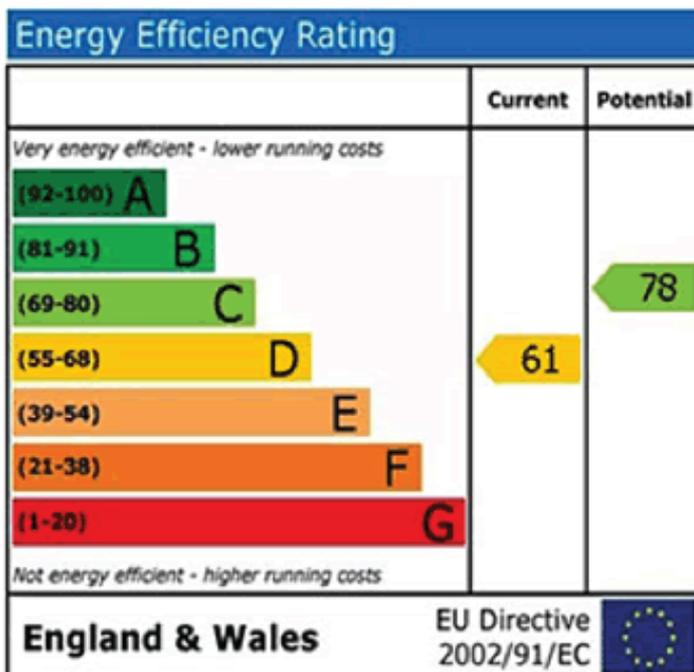
4-2-1 There is a government rating system for the assessment of the energy efficiency of a domestic dwelling. This is referred to as the Standard Assessment Procedure or SAP. The higher the figure the more energy efficient the dwelling is. The Institute Of Energy & Sustainable Development recommends that Affordable Warmth programmes 'include a greater emphasis on energy efficiency' (Fleming, P, 2006, 'Response to the DTI Energy Review')

4-2-2 Unity has set a target minimum SAP of 65, which is above the current government target. An average score of 73 has been achieved across the housing stock, which is considerably higher than our target and that set by a central government.

4-2-3 While it is acknowledged that a rating of 73 is at the lower end of the C rating category, we are clear that a significantly higher energy efficiency rating can only be achieved by utilising a variety of existing and developing technologies including renewables.

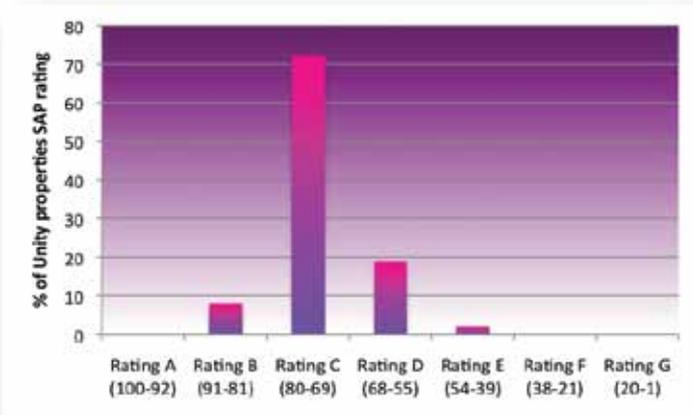
4-2-4 Relatively few of our properties have achieved a rating below 65. Any properties achieving a SAP score below 65 are targeted through the implementation of all low cost works, recommended on the EPC, with the high cost works being scheduled onto planned maintenance programmes.

4-2-5 It is important to note that the energy efficiency rating of the dwelling does not provide details to illustrate whether a resident is living in fuel poverty. The EPC will not detail the household income, the ratio that is spent on fuel or how the resident pays for their fuel. Rather the EPC will only report on how energy efficient the property is. It can therefore only be considered as a fabric assessment of the issue.

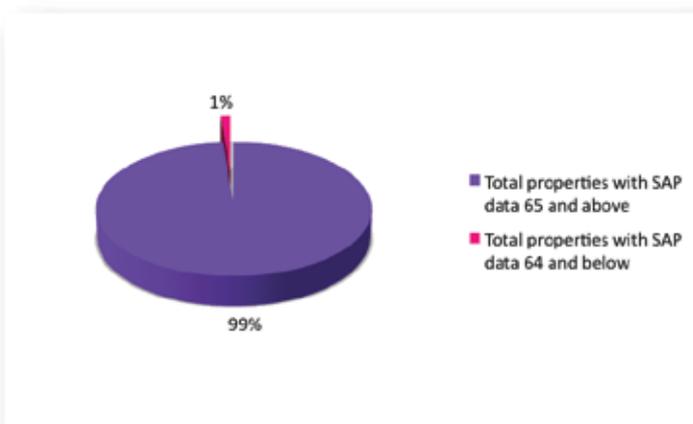


4-3 Data On Unity Housing Stock Energy Performance Rating

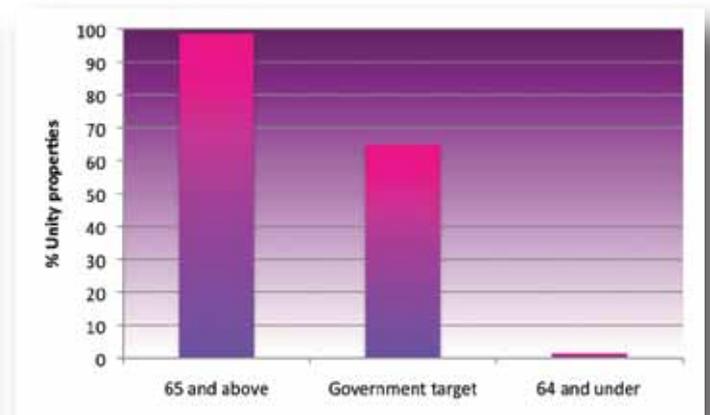
4-3-1 The chart below indicates the percentage of Unity properties achieving a SAP rating of between A and G. The majority of properties, 73%, have achieved a SAP rating of between 69 and 80, which is significantly higher than Unity's target of 65.



4-3-2 The chart below details that out of 900 properties Unity possesses SAP data on, 13 of these properties have a SAP rating below 65. Accordingly, approximately 1.4% of the properties that have been tested have a rating below the Unity target of 65.



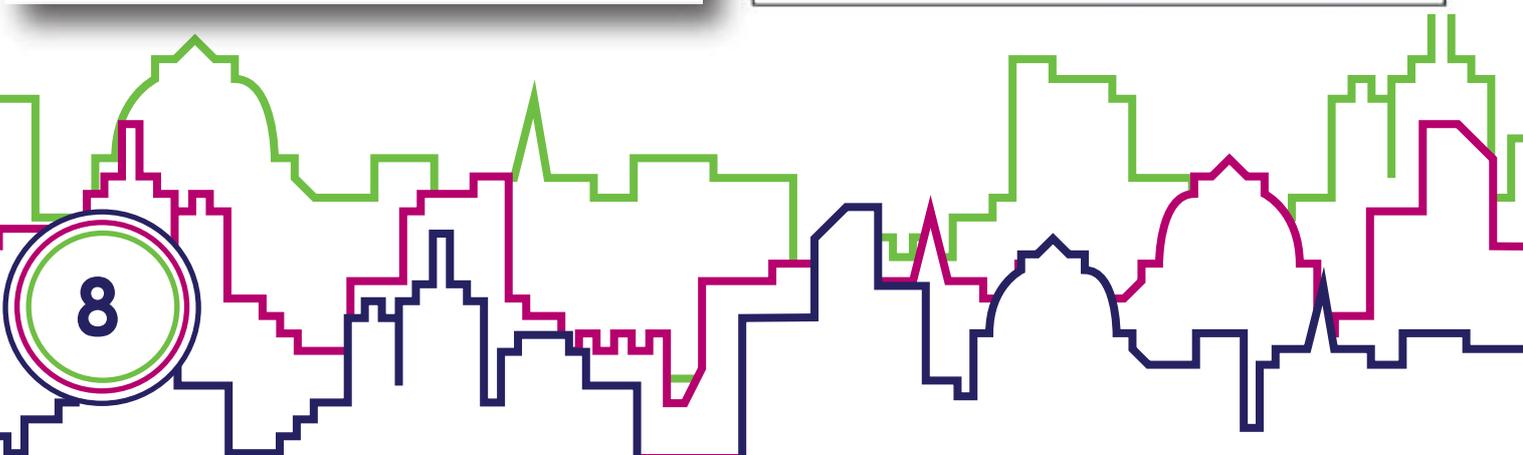
4-3-3 Of the 13 properties that have a SAP rating below 65, all are actual tests. The properties receiving a SAP score of below 65 will be targeted for improvement. All the low cost works recommended on the EPC will be undertaken to improve the energy efficiency rating. All high cost works will be considered in light of planned maintenance programmes and in light of the senior management decision on the direction Unity will move towards in respect of renewable energy.



4-3-4 The table above details that 98.6% of Unity properties, where data is available, have achieved a SAP rating of 65 and above, 65 being our target. 1.4% of Unity properties have achieved a score of 64 and below. In respect of these properties, a programme of works will be scheduled. All low cost works recommended, following the test, will be undertaken and all high cost works will be considered as part of a planned maintenance programme.

4-3-5 The extract below is information that has been taken from an Energy Performance Certificate. Energy Performance Certificates are provided to all new residents. The certificate provides an indication as to what the heating, hot water and lighting bills will be, giving residents control over how to manage their fuel costs. It is intended that at a tenancy sign up, staff will be trained to interpret the certificate.

Estimated energy use, carbon dioxide (CO ₂) emissions and fuel costs of this home		
	Current	Potential
Energy use	440 kWh/m ² per year	382 kWh/m ² per year
Carbon dioxide emissions	3.0 tonnes per year	2.6 tonnes per year
Lighting	£40 per year	£29 per year
Heating	£321 per year	£251 per year
Hot water	£116 per year	£116 per year



5. How Will The Most Vulnerable Residents Be Reached?

5-1 Identification

5-1-1 A comprehensive understanding of the housing stock, informed through stock condition surveys and energy performance tests. The information derived from these surveys will highlight the properties that are most energy inefficient and those in which further works are required to improve the energy efficiency.

5-1-2 A comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic circumstances and the family composition of residents. This information will be analysed to assist in the identification of those residents who may be affected by fuel poverty. This data can then be used to develop tailored advice which appreciated the individual needs of our customers.

5-1-3 The lettings policy will be reviewed, regularly, in order to ascertain if properties are under-occupied. Customers will be encouraged to downsize to a more suitable property.

5-2 Improving Customer Awareness

In order to reach the most vulnerable residents, it is important that Unity raises customer awareness in respect of the concept of fuel poverty generally and the detrimental consequences it can have on an individual's quality of life.

5-2-1 Front line staff will be trained to provide clear advice and practical information on:

- Energy efficiency
- Fuel poverty
- Measures to reduce fuel bills
- Better use of existing technology

Front line staff will:

- Signpost residents to further appropriate support and information
- Provide advice as to how the heating system within the property should be operated to ensure its effectiveness
- Advise customers on the benefits of property downsizing
- Explain the advantages of various heating tariffs and payment methods with the aim of exposing customers to the range of choices available, rather than recommending any one supplier.

5-3 Programmed Maintenance Works

5-3-1 Programmed maintenance works will be undertaken to improve the energy efficiency of properties. The works will be considered in light of the results from energy performance tests and stock condition surveys. The results from these surveys will assist in informing planned works, with a specific emphasis on assisting residents potentially suffering from a lack of affordable warmth.

5-3-2 A proportion of the programmed maintenance budget will be allocated towards undertaking programmed energy efficiency works. This will be achieved by the reallocation of existing funds into an 'Energy Efficiency Measures' budget head. (Grant allocation funding should and will also be captured where available.)

5-3-3 During the annual gas servicing the opportunity will be taken to ensure the heating system is operating in an efficient manner and general advice will be provided by our heating engineers in respect of optimising the using of heating system.

5-3-4 Unity will thoroughly evaluate all developments arising in the renewable energy market to ascertain whether they will be beneficial in delivering our strategy; for instance renewables such as ground and air-source exchange technology, photovoltaic panels etc.

5-3 Energy Performance Tests

5-4-1 A database will record the energy performance rating of all Unity properties.

5-4-2 All low cost works recommended, following an energy performance test, will be undertaken and recorded.

5-4-3 All high cost works recommended, from the energy performance test, will be recorded and considered as part of a planned maintenance programme.

6. How Will The Strategy Be Delivered?

6-1 The strategy cannot be delivered in isolation, rather engagement will be required between staff, customers and the wider community. All those involved will continue to enhance and shape the strategy's development, thereby accommodating changing circumstances.

6-2 Unity is committed to directing resources in both time, staff training and existing capital through the reallocation of existing budget heads to deliver the aims of the strategy.

6-3 The strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that it is focussed on the correct issues and is being delivered effectively.

7. Who Will The Strategy Be Delivered To?

7-1 The strategy will be delivered to all Unity customers. In particular, it is important that the most vulnerable residents are reached. These customers will be reached through an identification process which will involve collating data on:

- ✓ The condition of the housing stock: This will enable us to compile an understanding of the energy efficiency of each property and an understanding of what planned maintenance works should be undertaken, to increase the efficiency of the property.
- ✓ The socio-economic characteristics of Unity's customers: This will assist in an understanding and identification of those residents who are prone to fuel poverty.

8. Consultation

8-1 The strategy will be delivered in consultation with Unity Housing's customers and staff members.



9. Objectives Of The Affordable Warmth Strategy

Objective

Deliver Affordable Warmth to the customers of the organisation ensuring that energy awareness and advice reaches the most vulnerable customers, thereby encouraging benefit uptake and the maximisation of household income.

Objective

Reduce the instances of fuel poverty amongst residents of the Association.

Objective

Ensure that the benefits of energy efficiency measures are brought to the attention of all households.

Objective

The implementations of the Affordable Warmth Strategy within our own housing stock through an effective use of programmed maintenance works, energy efficient products and specifications.



10. Aims Of The Affordable Warmth Strategy

Aim 1

To promote awareness of fuel poverty and energy awareness amongst our customers and staff members

Aim 2

Support, educate and advise our customers generally in respect of energy efficiency, how to live in a greener way and to assist customers in reducing their fuel costs.

Aim 3

To work towards ensuring that all customers can reasonably afford to heat their homes at an affordable cost.

Aim 4

To develop effective mechanisms to capture data on energy efficiency of the housing stock, which will assist in informing planned maintenance programmes.

Aim 5

To develop effective mechanisms to capture data on the profile of residents so as to assist in the identification process of those residents who may be susceptible to fuel poverty data will be used to inform and ensure that there is a continuous loop guiding improvements in respect of Affordable Warmth.

Aim 6

To improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock, thereby reducing the incidents of fuel poverty amongst residents and in doing so maintain a housing stock that is capable of delivering affordable warmth and exceeding Decent Homes Standard thermal comfort, whilst ensuring that energy advice is married with these home improvements.

Aim 7

To ensure that staff have the necessary training and ability to deliver the strategy and manage the resources available.

Aim 8

To work in partnership with agencies to deliver this strategy.