



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods



Affordable Warmth Strategy

Fighting Fuel Poverty

2016 – 2021

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

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

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

Business focussed – Continually review and adopt best practice and ensure we operate efficiently and effectively in order to make best use of resources.

Equality and Fairness - in the way we work and deliver our services.

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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 While the 10% Indicator (Fuel Poverty defined as any household that needs to spend more than 10% of its total income on fuel to maintain an adequate standard of heating) is still used in practice as a **measure of fuel poverty, it has now been superseded by the 'Low Income High Cost' (LIHC)** indicator.

Under the LIHC definition, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:

- They have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level)
- Were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

- 1.1.3 The governments Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2015, while providing a competent analysis of fuel poverty in England, does not define an adequate standard of heating required to maintain health and well-being. Consequently, we still refer to and use the definition from the **government's** UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 report, **which states 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.'**

- 1.1.4 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:

- The energy consumption of homes and lifestyle of households
- The high cost of energy and expensive to run heating systems
- Low income

- 1.1.5 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. This is underpinned by the governments Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2015 and we will continue to ensure that we meet or better all Government targets in advance of their deadlines.



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 system.

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 To date, while we have used renewable technologies on a number of new development and refurbishment projects it has not proved cost effective to use them across all our stock. This has **been due to consistently reducing 'feed in tariff' prices against the high cost of installation and maintenance.** Unity Housing Association is however committed to using such technologies for the benefit of our customers and the benefit of the wider community in reducing carbon footprints. We will consider them whenever appropriate and cost effective for new developments, refurbishments and situations where these are the only means available to achieve our target rd SAP rating.



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 The governments previous fuel poverty strategy which stated 'No person in England should have to live in fuel poverty, as far as is practicable, with a target date of 2016' has now been superseded by the 2015 AFPS report. This report sets a fuel poverty target aimed at ensuring that as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C by 2030.

'Via our 'Fabric First' approach to our properties Unity Housing Association is already well ahead of this target with only 9.6% (116 no) of our properties falling below band C in 2016

- 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.
- 3.3 Accordingly, as part of Unity Housing's commitment to responding to and supporting the needs of our 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.

4. Objectives of the Affordable Warmth Strategy

Objective 1:

Deliver Affordable Warmth to the customers of the organisation ensuring that energy awareness and advice reaches the most vulnerable customers

Objective 2:

Reduce the instances of fuel poverty amongst residents of the Association using a fabric first approach. This will also aid to increase the SAP rating of the property.

Objective 3:

Ensure that the benefits of energy efficiency measures are brought to the attention of all households via the Green Doctor service.

Objective 4:

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

5. Aims of Affordable Warmth Strategy

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

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.

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

4: 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.

5: To improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock and in doing so maintain a housing stock that is capable of delivering affordable warmth and exceeds Decent Homes Standard thermal comfort, whilst ensuring that energy advice is married with these home improvements.

6: To meet the Governments 2030 targets in respect of rd. SAP and energy efficiency (Minimum individual rd. SAP rating of 69 with an average rd. SAP rating across the stock of 73, prior to 2030).

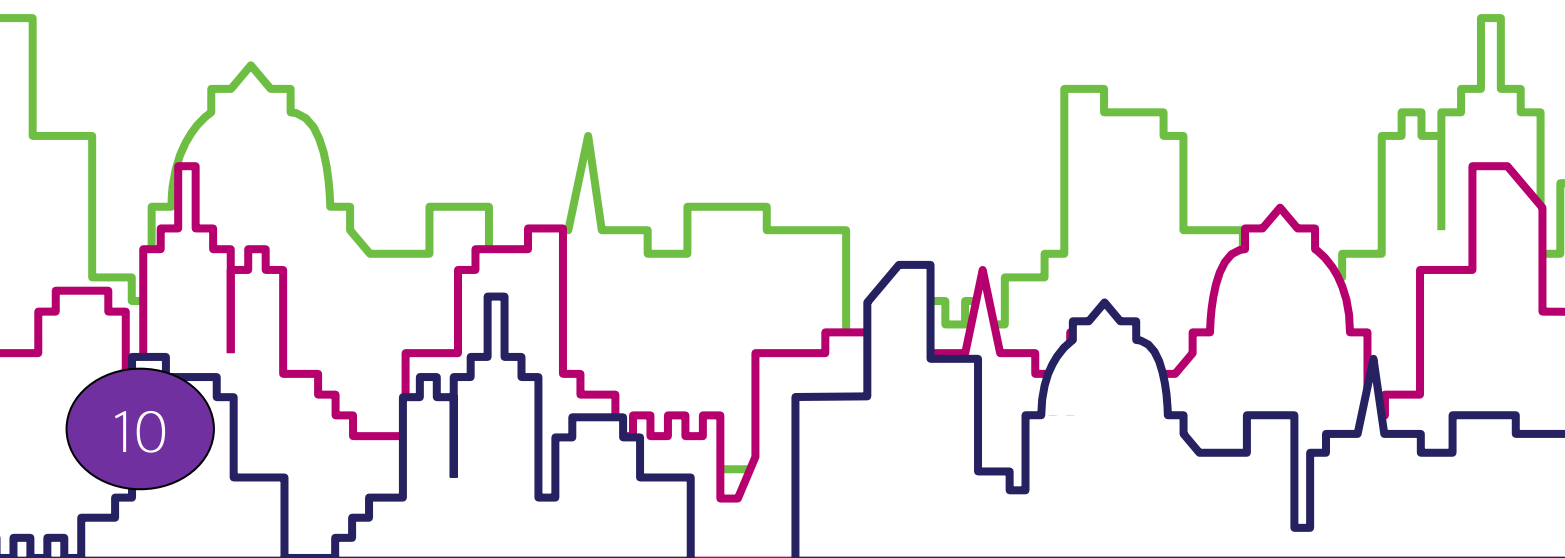
7: To ensure that staff have the necessary training and ability to deliver the strategy and manage the resources available.

8: To work in partnership with agencies to deliver this strategy.

6. Energy Performance

- 6.1** 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'). The SAP rating is further divided into bands from A to G as detailed in 6.4 below. The average rating for a dwelling in the United Kingdom is 'reduced (rd.) SAP 60, band D.
- 6.2** Unity has set a target minimum rating of 'reduced (rd.) SAP' 69 (Band C) with an average 'rd. SAP' 73 across all our dwellings. This is the current government target for 2030. We already have an average rd. SAP of 73 for all dwellings across our stock and only 9.6% (116 no.) of our dwellings are below the minimum of rd. SAP 69.
- 6.3** It is acknowledged that a minimum rating of 69 is the lower end of the band C rating category and we are clear that a significantly higher energy efficiency rating will only be achieved on our older Victorian stock by utilising a variety of existing and developing technologies including renewables
- 6.4** The position of our properties in respect of rd. SAP as compared to the rest of the United Kingdom (2012 information) is detailed below. This comparison shows our stock to be rated high in respect of energy efficiency and that we are well placed to meet the Governments 2030 target well ahead of time.

Band	Rd SAP Rating	Number of Unity Properties	% of Unity Stock	% of UK Stock in Band
A	92+	3	0.5	0.1
B	81-91	149	13.5	1.2
C	69-80	842	76	22.6
D	55-68	109	9.5	46.2
E	39-54	7	0.5	24.6
F	21-38	0	0	4.2
G	1-20	0	0	1.2
No Information	-----	12	1	-----



- 6.5 Any properties achieving an rd SAP score below 69 (band C) will be brought to target via the implementation of all low cost works recommended on the energy performance certificate. These works, such as boiler renewal, cavity and loft insulation, will be contained within existing budget heads. Any high cost works being recommended on the certificate will be scheduled onto planned maintenance programmes between now and 2026. Again these works, such as window frame renewal, roof renewal and internal wall insulation, will be contained within existing budget heads.
- 6.6 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 energy performance certificate (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 issues.

7. Data on Unity Housing Stock Energy Performance Rating

- 7.1.1 Unity possesses rd. SAP data on 99% of its stock. Information on the remaining 1% will be collected early in 2016.
- 7.1.2 The table at .4 above indicates the percentage of Unity properties achieving a SAP rating of between A and G. The majority of our properties, 90% have an rd. SAP rating above 69.

8. Profile of Unity Housing Stock

- 8.1 Unity Housing is currently managing an expanding portfolio of approximately **1199 properties** throughout Leeds of these we actively monitor and manage the energy efficiency of 1122 (Excludes 77 shared ownership properties which are all above rd. Sap 73). The properties are diverse in respect of locality, dwelling type and 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.
- 8.2 One of the aims of our strategy is to reduce the number of our properties that have an energy efficiency rating below band C (One hundred and sixteen in June 2016) and ensure compliance **with the Government's strategy as detailed in the Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2015**. Our current high rated, energy efficient stock means we are well placed to achieve this prior to the Government's 2030 target date.

9. How will the most vulnerable tenants be reached?

9.1 Identification

- 9.1.1 We have a comprehensive understanding of our housing stock, informed through stock condition surveys and energy performance tests. The information derived from these surveys & tests will highlight the properties that are most energy inefficient and those in which further works are required to improve the energy efficiency.
- 9.1.2 We continue to develop a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic circumstances and the family composition of our residents. This information will be used to assist in the identification of those residents who may be affected by fuel poverty. We can then develop tailored advice which appreciates the individual needs of our customers.
- 9.1.3 Our policies will continue to be reviewed, regularly, in order to ascertain if properties are under-occupied. Customers will be encouraged to downsize to a more suitable property.

9.2 Improving Customer Awareness

- 9.2.1 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.
- 9.2.2 Front line staff will continue to be trained to provide clear advice and practical information on:
- ☑ Energy efficiency Fuel Poverty
 - ☑ Measures to reduce fuel bills
 - ☑ Better use of existing technology
- 9.2.3 Front line staff will continue to:
- ☑ 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

9.3 Green Doctor

9.3.1 Unity Housing Association working in partnership with the Groundworks Green Doctor team, offers a free service in which we provide support information and advice on:

- ☑ Switching suppliers
- ☑ Energy bills and fuel debt
- ☑ Behavioural changes to reduce costs
- ☑ Managing heating control

9.3.2 The Green Doctor Service also supply and install simple energy-saving measures including:

- ☑ Energy-efficient light bulbs
- ☑ Draught excluders
- ☑ Reflective radiator panels
- ☑ Pipe lagging
- ☑ Hot water tank jackets
- ☑ Water saving devices



9.4 Programmed Maintenance Works

9.4.1 Planned maintenance programmes will be used 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.

9.4.2 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.

9.4.3 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.

9.5 Energy Performance Tests

9.5.1 We record the energy performance rating of all Unity properties and detail these on our Energy Performance Test spreadsheet for detailed analysis.

9.5.2 All low cost works recommended, following an energy performance test, will be undertaken on notification and recorded.

9.5.3 All high cost work recommended from the energy performance test will be recorded and entered into our planned maintenance programme. Where possible, any intrusive works will be undertaken when a property becomes void

10. How will the Strategy be delivered?

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Unity is committed to directing resources in time, staff training and existing capital through existing budget heads to deliver the aims of the strategy.
- 10.3 The strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is focused on the correct issues and is being delivered effectively.

11. Who will the strategy be delivered to?

- 11.1 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.



12. Consultation

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