

Energy efficiency trainings for social housing

Empowering vulnerable consumers in South Tyneside

A Covenant of Mayors 2016 Case Study

In a nutshell

The Council's Housing Company has put in place a training scheme to teach municipal staff and tenants basic energy management and energy efficiency principles. The scheme aims to foster energy savings and energy renovation in social housing.



South Tyneside in numbers

Number of towns in the metropolitan borough: 6

Number of inhabitants: 151,600

CO₂ reduction target: 20% (baseline year 2005)

Number of Covenant of Mayors signatories in North East England: 12

Participation in other relevant initiatives: The Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change (2005), The Guardian's 10:10 campaign (2009)

Background

Covering 25 square miles, South Tyneside is the smallest metropolitan borough council in England and Wales with a population of 151,600 inhabitants, and includes the towns of South Shields, Hebburn and Jarrow, and the villages of Boldon, Cleadon and Whitburn. South Tyneside Council signed the Covenant of Mayors in 2009, setting a target to reduce carbon emissions by at least 20.5% by 2020 compared to 2005 levels.

Their Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) draws a vision for South Tyneside's carbon future, setting a number of strategic objectives and identifying a set of actions to reduce carbon emissions, with an important focus on increasing energy efficiency and the borough's renewable energy technology capacity.

Besides, in June 2014, the Department of Energy and Climate indicated that 11% of households in South Tyneside (7,200 out of 65,800) were in a situation of fuel poverty. To address this, South Tyneside Council strengthened its focus on tackling fuel poverty and health problems arising from increased energy costs, while encouraging behavioural change in energy consumption patterns. According to the SEAP, the housing sector accounts for the biggest share of CO₂ emissions, especially in domestic buildings.

An integrated strategy

To tackle energy poverty in South Tyneside, the Council set up a multi-agency Fuel Poverty and Falls Prevention Partnership in order to maximise partners' participation in the regional energy efficiency delivery programme 'Warm Up North', and to explore the link between fuel poverty and health. The Integrated Housing Strategy launched in 2015 represents another effort in the same direction, towards a multi-faceted approach to tackling fuel poverty supporting people in all types of housing circumstances.

An example of multi-level governance

With the objective of empowering vulnerable consumers in the energy market, in 2013 South Tyneside Homes – the Council’s housing company - secured funding from the Big Energy Saving Network Programme of the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), to deliver an extensive outreach plan. The Big Energy Saving Network Programme focuses on helping consumers to reduce their energy costs through action on tariffs, switching, and the take-up of energy efficiency offers.

Cascading trainings

The project developed by South Tyneside included the delivery of in-house trainings on energy management and energy savings to 170 front line staff of South Tyneside Homes and 40 involved tenants. Trainings are conducted by the Involvement Team of South Tyneside Homes, in charge of managing the many volunteers working for the company. The people following the training are expected to share their learning with the wider community, friends and family.

Additional funding secured for 2014-15 was used by the Involvement Team to update the training programme for further roll-out to tenants. The training focused on energy efficiency issues and the encouragement of tenants to take ownership of their relationship with energy and switching suppliers themselves rather than directing to or providing a switching service per se.

Long-term capacity building

As a result, there has been an overall increase in the number of issues being referred and therefore an increase in the number of opportunities to provide quality energy-related advice to tenants. The enquiries / issues dealt with so far tend to be quite complex, ranging from accrued debt and missed repayments to self-disconnection issues amongst the most vulnerable.

A key factor of success was the appointment of a ‘Network Champion’ within the community, who was then responsible for rolling out the training to colleagues in South Tyneside Homes, so that they could in turn pass on energy awareness information to the wider community. This not only helped to build a participative process based on trust and proximity, but also reinforced the consumers’ sense of ownership.

The impact of this project can be evaluated both in the short and longer term. In the short-term South Tyneside Homes now has a significantly increased capacity to deliver energy-related advice to their tenants, while the legacy of the Big Energy Saving Programme provides valuable long-term capacity to cascade training and share learning.



Project numbers

Project duration: **2013-2015**

170 front-line staff trained in the first year

40 tenants trained in the first year

“ There has been a great deal in the news recently about major hikes in fuel prices, which means it is more important than ever before that people in the borough, who are feeling this financial strain, are given the optimum information on how to save money on their energy bills ”.

Councillor Jim Foreman, the Lead Member for Housing and Transport and also a Board Member for South Tyneside Homes

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