

Headlines for Housing Plus Academy Tenant Workshop

Climate Crisis and Social Housing: What can tenants do?

4th December 2019, London School of Economics

1. The climate emergency

- There is overwhelming evidence of the reality and science of climate change, with many impacts already playing out before our eyes: rising temperatures; extreme weather conditions; coastal erosion food shortages
- We need to act now if we are going to slow climate change. 270 councils across the UK have declared a climate emergency with a commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. But climate change requires a radical change of direction and action now.

2. Retrofitting existing homes

- Improving the energy efficiency of existing homes can be achieved through a “whole house” retrofit or through incremental upgrading. If resources are available then a full retrofit can reduce energy use up to 90%. Retrofit uses about one tenth of the materials needed for new build. It is important to look at each property on an individual basis to see what work needs to be done.
- Retrofitting is far less damaging to the environment than demolition and rebuilding due to the high embodied carbon in the existing stock. Bricks, glass, slate, steel and concrete are all highly energy intensive to produce. They also have limited supply. It would take 40 years for even the most energy efficient new home to offset the carbon cost of demolition and new build, even for the most difficult to renovate homes.
- The cost of retrofitting is normally cheaper than the full cost of demolition and rebuild. Retrofitting existing homes preserves the supply of social housing units and it keeps the community together, with less disruption to tenant’s lives.
- As with any regeneration project, it is important to involve tenants at every stage and ensure their views are taken into account in every decision

3. What else landlords can do:

- There are also other small changes landlords can make to properties which make a big differences:
 - i. Switching to LED Lighting in offices and properties.
 - ii. Switching void properties to renewable energy suppliers
 - iii. Fitting shower heads that use less water but with the same pressure
 - iv. Installing dual flush toilets
 - v. Putting reflective strips behind radiators
- It is important landlords engage with the tenants. One organisation had set up a “Green Doctors” scheme which work with tenants on a one to one basis to help them lead greener lives. However, there was relatively low take up of the scheme, so engaging with tenants about these issues is critical. The organisation also provided all new tenants with an energy pack that included an energy bulb, and Eon energy saving pack and information on energy saving.

4. Funding environmental work

- There are grants available to housing associations to fund environmental projects but housing associations feel there needs to be more government money available to make the projects self-sustaining.
- One organisation had a big problem with litter on the estate for example, fast food litter, so the restaurants around the edge of the estate (Nando's and KFC) agreed to fund litter picking schemes on the estate and provide funding for other environmental projects.
- Other organisations have also worked with big companies using their social responsibility budgets to fund environmental projects.

5. What tenants can do themselves

- There are lots of ways tenants can help protect the environment, particularly by reducing waste and energy use. These projects can also help tackle other problems in the community, for example:
 - i. A community fridge is a place where people can drop off food that would otherwise go to waste and other people can collect it for free, tackling food waste and providing food to those who may struggle to afford it. In one scheme mentioned at the workshop, 20 different supermarkets and the local allotment association also donated food. For the supermarkets it often works out cheaper to donate the food to the fridge rather than taking it to landfill. The community fridge is run by volunteers with food hygiene qualifications.
 - ii. Running litter picking schemes with children, rewarding them for taking part and teaching them how to look after the local environment
- People can also make changes to their own lives to reduce their environmental impact:
 - i. Only buying what food you need and trying to eat seasonally
 - ii. Fitting draft excluders and cling film over windows, as well as putting on a jumper and slippers, so you can have the heating on less
 - iii. Trying to walk for short journeys, and using public transport instead of using the car

6. Green spaces and growing things

- Green spaces play a key role in slowing climate change. It is important for landlords to make the most of existing green spaces, for example wildflower planting on unused bits of land. There were lots of good examples of utilising green spaces and growing projects during the workshop.
- Where there isn't a lot of green space available planters, window boxes, hanging baskets, and pots can be used to very good effect, as well as indoor plants.
- Scraps of land, verges, front gardens, pavements and balconies can all be used for plants and pots.
- Green spaces and community gardens also help bring the community together and can help improve people's wellbeing.

Top ideas from the workshop that people will share within their communities and organisations:

- Setting up and continuing to work on community gardens
 - Community herb growing – communities with a mix of nationalities and ethnicities encouraging people to grow herbs that represent where they are from
- Community fridges
- Composting schemes
 - Hot composting
- Energy Bag with echo lightbulbs, leaflets etc
- Walking/cycling buses
- Teaching residents about the importance of climate change and what they can do in their own homes to save energy
 - Green Doctors
- Putting foil reflectors behind radiators
- Projects to teach children how live more sustainable lives and the importance of looking after the environment through:
 - cooking
 - gardening
 - litter picking
- Cooking workshops to help people learn how to tackle food waste
- Using renewable energy sources e.g. solar panels
- LED Lighting in houses
- Green cafes that work to stop food waste and teach people about climate change
 - Use food from community gardens
- Encouraging tenants to grow plants in their own homes
 - Subscription boxes of information about growing and seeds
 - a plant for all new tenants
- Work with co-operatives
- Will discuss ideas with new contacts from event
- Using thermal cameras to see where there are problems in buildings
- Using the Together with Tenants charter to force change
- Switching gas boilers to electric
- Planting in unused land
- More economical shopping - only buying what you need
- Litter picking projects
- Get grant funding to help set up new green projects
- District heating
- Bee keeping
- Aiming for a zero carbon estate