



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

7

8 February 2024

Report of	Director of Assets (Interim) Colchester Borough Homes	Author	Mark Wicks
Title	Housing stock and sustainability		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1.0 Executive Summary

Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) and Colchester City Council (CCC) are committed to enhancing the energy performance of its housing stock and contributing to sustainability goals and create energy-efficient living spaces for its residents. This report outlines key initiatives, improvements, and future plans to enhance sustainability, and improvements in CCC's housing stock energy performance.

2.0 Recommended Decision

Report is for information only; panel are asked to note the contents.

3.0 Summary of progress and applied measures

There are a number of measures and initiatives in place and planned to improve the energy efficiency of CCC Housing Stock.

3.1 Housing stock

3.1.1 EPC (Energy Performance Certificates)

An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is a document that details the energy efficiency of a property, providing a rating from A (most efficient) to G (least efficient). It includes recommendations for improving energy efficiency.

3.1.2 SAP Scores

The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) score measures the overall energy performance of a dwelling. It considers factors such as insulation, heating systems, and renewable technologies to provide a holistic view of energy efficiency.

A property with a SAP between 69 and 80 will achieve an EPC rating of C.

3.1.3 EPC Target 2030

The Governments Clean Growth Strategy includes a commitment to improving the energy efficiency of homes and buildings. The target set for rented properties is a minimum EPC C (SAP 69) by 2035 and 2030 for 'fuel poor' households. In addition, Colchester City Council's Asset Management Strategy 2022-26 sets a target of 100% of stock rated at EPC 'C' or above (where this is practical, cost-effective, and affordable).

3.1.4 Average SAP Score Improvement

Since 2021, CCC has made commendable progress, with the average SAP score across its housing stock increasing from 75.02 to 75.71. This signifies a consistent effort to enhance the overall energy performance of properties.

3.1.5 EPC Ratings Above C (SAP 69)

Currently, CCC's housing stock is in a healthy position with 86.3% of properties with an EPC rating of C or above, surpassing the benchmark set by the National Federation of ALMOs (Arm's Length Management Organisation) Value for Money review, which reported an upper quartile result of 72.32 in December 2023.

3.1.6 CO₂ Emission Reduction

The average CO₂ levels generated from heating CCC homes have seen a notable reduction of 55kg per property annually. Additionally, the average CO₂ level is 22kg lower than benchmarked averages, as reported by Parity Portfolio energy modelling software.

3.1.7 Future Improvements

CCC is committed to ongoing enhancements through the Capital Works Programme, ensuring a sustained and steady trajectory of energy performance improvements across its housing stock. In addition, specific projects are in progress to further boost energy performance.

3.1.8 Planned Improvements via the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Project

CCC is actively involved in the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) project, aiming to implement energy-efficient measures to 105 properties with a current EPC rating of 'D' or lower.

In addition, further, other retrofit works are planned, targeting the improvement of at least an additional 25 properties by the summer of 2025.

3.1.9 Strategy for improving housing stock

Colchester Borough Homes and Colchester City Council are committed to improving the energy performance of the housing stock. Our strategy involves prioritising the improvement of the worst-performing properties first. Despite facing challenges, we are in a favourable position, as only 13.7% of our housing stock requires enhancements. This targeted approach allows us to efficiently work towards our goal, ensuring energy efficiency and sustainability is provided to our customers.

3.2 Enhanced control and monitoring

In order to effectively improve energy efficiency and sustainability of the existing stock it is important to provide customers with effective methods of control. Smart devices also provide a methodology for measuring the effectiveness of completed energy improvement works. There is currently a key project underway which involves the installation of 'Switchee' Smart Thermostats.

3.2.1 Switchee Smart Thermostats

Switchee functions as an intelligent thermostat, facilitating the control of heating and hot water in our customer's homes. Upon installation, this device contributes to a potential 15% reduction in energy consumption, leading to lowered bills. Switchee is engineered to adapt to daily routines, automatically managing on/off cycles based on preferences. Additionally, it enables remote control of heating and hot water via a mobile app, offering convenience anytime, anywhere. Equipped with five sensors, the device monitors home performance and detects issues early on, enabling prompt resolution. Switchee ensures complete security and early issue identification, preventing them from escalating into larger problems. The devices also furnish real-time data on usage, allowing for effective monitoring of completed retrofit measures.

An initiative is currently in progress to implement 600 Switchee devices across 600 homes within the CCC Housing Stock as part of a pilot program. Properties earmarked for substantial retrofitting are included in this initial phase. As of mid-January 2024, 159 devices have been successfully installed and are operational. The installation of these devices aims to assist CBH and its customers in effectively maintaining their homes and reducing their carbon footprint.

3.3 Estate improvement and biodiversity

3.3.1 Cycling and Waste Recycling

Since 2020, advancements have been made in enhancing waste recycling and cycling facilities for Colchester City Council Housing Stock. We've created 13 designated recycling areas within the existing housing stock. Additionally, bicycle storage facilities have been added to four existing blocks. Furthermore, we've successfully delivered 24 new properties equipped with recycling provisions adhering to Colchester City Council planning standards in force at the time (these have now been superseded). These properties also feature bicycle provisions, such as sheds with bike loops, bike lockers, or bike racks. These improvements further reflect the commitment to promoting sustainability in line with established standards.

3.3.2 Discontinuation of Glyphosate for weed control

The decision to discontinue Glyphosate for weed control has led to noticeable changes in weed management across our estates.

3.3.3 Hard Surfaces

Previously, Glyphosate was efficiently used to treat weeds on hard surfaces, unfortunately, manual methods such as strimming are less effective and time-consuming. To help address this, an additional operative has been employed, however, the contractor now conducts fewer visits per year to manage weeds on hard surfaces.

3.3.4 Shrub Borders

Glyphosate was previously used for spot treatment, but now, alternative herbicides are employed. The additional cost associated with this is covered by existing budgets. A mixed approach of spot treatment and manual weed removal is now implemented, along with a mulching program to suppress weed growth.

3.3.5 Mulching Program

Mulching has proven effective in weed control, with mulched borders showing significantly less weed growth. The program, utilising wood chips from the Council's Tree Team, aligns with sustainability goals and helps reduce costs.

While alternative methods are being explored, such as mechanical weed control, the transition away from Glyphosate requires careful planning and ongoing adjustments to ensure effective weed management across all estates.

3.3.6 Wildflower areas and Tree Planting

Good progress has been made in creating wildflower areas and tree planting across CCC estates. These initiatives link closely with themes 1 and 4 of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan - 'Adapting to a changing climate' and 'Enhance biodiversity and protect our environment'.

3.3.6.1 Wildflower Areas

- Three wildflower areas have been developed on HRA (Housing Revenue Account) land. These areas are thriving and positively impacting local wildlife.
- Plans are underway to replicate this model across all estates to enhance biodiversity, aligning with the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

3.3.6.2 Tree Planting

- During winter of 2022/23, 30 trees were planted across various estate locations.
- An additional 50 trees were planted in partnership with the Council's Greening Team and the Local Authority Tree Fund in Greenstead, focusing on areas near main transport routes to mitigate pollution.
- This winter, another 20 trees have been planted in similar locations to further enhance air quality and green infrastructure.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) and Colchester City Council (CCC) are steadfast in their commitment to enhancing the energy performance of their housing stock and promoting sustainability. The report outlines various initiatives and improvements aimed at achieving these goals.

Efforts to improve energy efficiency, as evidenced by the increase in average SAP scores and the high percentage of properties with EPC ratings above C, demonstrate significant progress. Additionally, the reduction in CO₂ emissions and ongoing plans for future improvements through projects like the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) highlight the continued dedication to sustainability.

The introduction of Switcher Smart Thermostats and advancements in waste recycling and cycling facilities further underscore CCC's proactive approach to enhancing energy efficiency and promoting biodiversity.

Initiatives such as wildflower areas and tree planting align closely with broader environmental objectives, reflecting a holistic commitment to sustainability.

Moving forward, CCC remains focused on prioritising improvements to ensure energy efficiency and sustainability are accessible to all residents, while continually seeking innovative solutions to further enhance environmental stewardship.

4.0 Alternative Options

4.1 Not applicable

5. Background Information

- 5.1 Adopting a comprehensive approach to its sustainability and improving the energy performance and sustainability of CCC Housing Stock is a key feature of the Colchester Housing Asset Management Strategy, January 2022.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 This report has no equality, diversity, and human rights implications.

7. Standard References

- 7.1 All of the updates provided in this report contribute to the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 theme of 'Respond to the climate emergency'.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 There are no consultation considerations for this paper. Consultation and active engagement with our customers were an essential part of the Asset Management Strategy and continues to be a vital aspect of planned and future energy retrofit projects.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 There are no specific publicity considerations.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications of the updates provided in this report.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 The provision of good quality, energy efficient homes promotes good health for our customers, combined with the provision of more facilities to support cycling, and biodiversity enhancements our communities and customer's physical and mental health is likely to see real benefits.
- 11.2 There are no anticipated impacts on community safety from the project updates presented in this report.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no health and safety implications beyond those assessed and managed at individual project level.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no risk management implications beyond those assessed and managed at individual project level.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The updates provided in this report for various projects are all geared towards minimising emissions and mitigating environmental impacts throughout the Council.