

Home Energy Conservation Act Report 2021

Swindon Borough Council

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires all local authorities in England to submit reports to the Secretary of State demonstrating what energy conservation measures they have adopted to improve the energy efficiency of residential accommodation within that LA's area. This covers measures to improve properties in the owner-occupier, private rented sector, and social rented sector. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) uses data submitted through these returns to inform policy thinking on energy efficiency, and to build an ongoing picture of local and national energy efficiency policy delivery.

Headline and Overview

Does your Local Authority have a current strategy on carbon reduction and/or energy efficiency for domestic or non-domestic properties?

Yes, the link is here:

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/download/1922/swindon_borough_council_carbon_reduction_strategy_2020

What scheme(s) is your Local Authority planning to implement in support of energy saving/carbon reduction in residential accommodation properties in the next two years?

Warm & Safe Wiltshire provides an energy efficiency advice service to help domestic households to access energy efficiency measures, reduce energy use, save money on energy bills, and access support to manage fuel debt and apply for financial support for energy bills. Considerable success has been achieved with promotions based around the Warm Home Discount rebate, and the scheme enjoys good collaboration with the health sector. Warm & Safe Wiltshire is commissioned until end of March 2022 – decisions will be made during 2021 regarding what scheme will follow this.

For owner occupied properties we can also use enforcement powers under the Housing Act 2004 to enable improvement works for cash poor occupiers with embedded capital in their property. Those applicants who cannot access funding for energy improvement works through supplier schemes and who appear vulnerable or in high need are now referred to the enforcement team for a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment and consideration for further intervention.

We are looking to take advantage of additional funding for energy efficiency programmes from Government, depending on eligibility criteria and distribution of those funds.

Social housing property support is addressed under the Social Housing section, although the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service is for all tenures.

What businesses, charities, third sector organisations or other stakeholders do you work with to deliver the scheme(s)?

The Warm & Safe Wiltshire service is provided by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, a charity, and it engages with many other third sector partners within the borough. It also links with health services including the Great Western Hospital and the Fire Service. SBC will also engage directly with appropriate partners to raise awareness of the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service, including Swindon Citizens Advice, Foodbanks, Age UK Wiltshire, Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire CCG, and other such organisations.

Contracts are tendered through council procurement rules, we work with the successful companies.

What has been, or will be, the outcome of the scheme(s)? These outcomes could include energy savings, carbon savings, economic impacts such as job creation and/or increased business competitiveness or societal impacts such as alleviation of fuel poverty and/or improved health outcomes etc.

In the last 2 years the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service has helped just under 1,900 households with a variety of services from accessing energy saving measures to applying for the Warm Home Discount rebate. Estimated savings on energy bills, benefit awards and grant awards from all the interventions is valued at £210,000 for the period. 67% of households contacting the service have a health condition that could be affected by a cold home, so it is hoped that some of these may be alleviated through additional warmth.

The Warm & Safe Wiltshire service will continue to help residents until the end of March 2022 - decisions will be made during 2021 regarding what scheme will follow this.

Communications

Does your Local Authority provide any advisory services to customers on how to save energy?

Yes, the Warm & Safe Wiltshire energy advice service is for domestic households only. No advisory service is offered to businesses.

How do you communicate or encourage energy saving amongst domestic consumers and/or local businesses?

The Warm & Safe Wiltshire service is promoted through partnership working and Council media streams where appropriate. Awareness raising campaigns are carried out to drive people to the service where advisors are then able to help with their queries.

Local Green Supply Chain

What actions are you taking, if any, to promote energy efficiency and the installer supply chain to consumers, and encourage households to consider energy retrofit?

All promotion of energy efficiency measures is part of the Warm & Safe Wiltshire programme previously mentioned. Our Adult Community Learning team has also produced a short online training course, delivered in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, to go through the basics of how we use energy in our homes. This will help residents understand where they can make savings on their energy bills, and also covers the topic of fuel poverty and how this impacts households in the UK, and where residents can get support if they are struggling to afford their bills and stay warm.

<https://www.webenrol.com/swindon/?page=detail&courseCode=4293&cat=23&location=&>

Do you have any plans to develop policies or initiatives in this space over the next five years as part of supporting your local decarbonisation efforts?

SBC has published a Carbon Reduction Strategy and action plan, this plan has ambitions to drive down Borough wide emissions over the next ten years. Whilst no specific actions have been identified as yet, this will be an area for future consideration.

Social Housing

What action, if any, has your LA taken to install energy efficiency or low carbon heat measures in social housing? Have these been installed to a satisfactory quality? What actions (if any) have your social housing partners taken?

At SBC we have recently created a new role within the council for a full time Energy & Innovation Lead. The post holder will provide a level of expertise in the area of domestic retrofit within our Social Housing department, helping to position Swindon Borough Council to identify and deliver energy efficiency improvement programmes. The primary objective will be the development of strategies, initiatives and concepts including producing detailed solutions that improve the overall performance and design of future works.

It will allow SBC to understand where we are in terms of energy efficiency and ensuring that sustainability, carbon reduction and thermal efficiency is at the heart of our property improvement model.

Our aim is to move away from single measure installs where possible and engage fully in a fabric first mentality combining primary and secondary measures to improve the energy performance throughout our stock.

Do you have easy access to the information/knowledge within your organisation that you would expect to need for social housing retrofit projects? (e.g. stock condition; property data; approach to procurement; alignment with existing internal maintenance/upgrade plans; tenant engagement and management plans; costings).

A sample stock condition report is undertaken periodically to define and understand our base position within our stock.

SBC engaged an external surveying and consultancy firm to carry out a 10% sample stock condition survey of our existing housing stock and related assets, to assess the condition and budget maintenance costs. The data gathered provided SBC with reliable costs for business planning and programming of future repair and improvement schemes that will be required over the next 30 years.

SBC holds data on all properties within our stock including lifecycles of all components such as roofs, windows, bathrooms, kitchens and electrical and heating systems. The data also includes build type and construction year.

This information allows for future schemes to be created based on needs and those which would benefit from a fabric first approach identified by cross referencing the component data with our EPC database.

SBC have numerous tenant engagement routes. These include the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, a group of council tenants who review the services delivered by Swindon Borough Council's housing departments, and Swindon Tenants Voice, which is a group consisting of housing tenants and leaseholders' to feedback on maintenance and improvement of the housing service.

How does your LA currently/how will your LA in future plan to go about identifying suitable housing stock and measures for retrofit? How do social housing partners identify suitable stock? By the same measures or via a different method?

As previously mentioned above SBC uses the compiled lifecycle data to initially form schemes for future works programs. The EPC database is also a key element to identify and justify future work schemes.

Domestic Private Rented Sector (PRS) Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

The Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations (the Regulations) apply to all privately rented properties in England and Wales. As of April 2020, landlords can no longer let or continue to let properties covered by the MEES Regulations if they have an EPC rating below E, unless they have a valid exemption in place.

What method or methods does your authority use to communicate with landlords and tenants about the standards and other related issues?

There is ongoing engagement work with agents. Whilst there has been no direct targeted communication with landlords to date, capacity does exist to directly mailshot and email known landlords.

Do you directly target landlords of EPC F and G rated properties to enforce these regulations? If yes, how? If no, please explain.

No direct targeting yet, but this may be possible through matching of the EPC database and known rented property lists, although there are some issues to date with the accuracy of the EPC database.

Financial Support for Energy Efficiency

What financial programmes, if any, do you have to promote domestic energy efficiency or energy saving? If applicable please outline the budget (and % of the budget that is used), where such funding is sourced and where it is targeted.

All tenures

The previously mentioned Warm & Safe Wiltshire programme provides domestic energy efficiency advice and support to all tenures.

Owner occupied & Private Rented

We have no grant funding exclusively targeting energy efficiency measures, but houses for disabled facilities applicants are improved for energy efficiency and adequate heating as part of the DFG process. There is an ECO Flex scheme which can help residents access the Energy Company Obligation scheme.

Our Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy enables greater enforcement in owner occupied properties (including for Works in Default) where significant Category 1 hazards are identified under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System but the occupier is unable to improve the property. Such occupiers often have significant capital in their property, but no simple means to draw on that capital. Using enforcement powers where appropriate in these cases enables the Council to carry out works to improve these properties whilst securing the monies used as a charge on the property.

Some funding was awarded through the Warm Homes Fund to the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service to help hard to reach fuel poor off-gas households, with a small proportion allocated for an emergency fund for heating support across Wiltshire and Swindon.

Social Housing

The energy efficiency of SBC owned homes is improved (where possible and financially viable) through ongoing annual maintenance and upgrade programmes. There are no funds specifically targeting energy efficiency.

What future investment for energy efficiency or low carbon heat measures do you have planned, and when are these investments planned for?

Owner occupied & Private Rented

Future investment is likely to depend on availability of funding schemes to bid into. There is little opportunity for funding from within the Council for such measures.

Social Housing

We currently have three future fabric first potential work programs we are developing to roll out through identified areas within our housing stock.

Firstly, 80 grade 2 listed dwellings within the Railway Village. We have had discussions with Heritage England who have agreed in principle to our proposed measures which include internal wall insulation, secondary glazing, heat recovery system and ASHPs. Heritage England will work with us on the specification and gaining listing building consent and the expertise of the new role will be a vital in this process.

Secondly, a further 181 dwellings which have electric storage heaters within our stock. We are looking at a number of primary and secondary measures to undertake at these properties.

Thirdly, we have identified those properties with poor EPC ratings outside of the two schemes referred to previously. Out of approximately 10,300 dwellings within our stock, we have identified 281 which would initially benefit from initial assessment and further investigation.

Fuel Poverty

Does your Local Authority have a Fuel Poverty Strategy?

Yes –the strategy is currently being refreshed so will be available soon.

What steps have you taken to identify residents/properties in fuel poverty?

Activity is focussed on the three key aims:

- To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
- To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
- To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

The Key Objectives are:

1. Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.

2. Provide information on and access into national funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.
3. Deliver a comprehensive energy advice service to Swindon residents, enabling them to keep warm in their homes and manage their fuel bills.
4. Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.
5. Strengthen the health focus of affordable warmth work in Swindon, including establishing a health and housing referral network for health professionals to refer residents into.

Support is provided through the Warm & Safe Wiltshire energy advice service, covering energy saving measures, heating measures, and financial support for energy bills including Warm Home Discount applications, Surviving Winter grants, tariff switching, and energy debt relief.

Much work has been done over the years to identify residents in fuel poverty. We will work with partner organisations across Swindon to identify people in fuel poverty and refer them to the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service. Campaigns are carried out at various times of the year, especially over the winter months, to reach people who may be struggling with their energy bills, pushing them towards the advice service. We also work with health and social care professionals to provide a referral route for their clients who need assistance.

How does fuel poverty interlink with your local authority's overall Carbon Reduction Strategy?

The promotion of energy efficiency measures through the fuel poverty work will link to the wider aims of the carbon reduction strategy. In particular:

Objective 5 in the Carbon Reduction Strategy is to reduce energy related emissions from SBC owned housing stock (including sheltered housing schemes).

Objective 9 is to identify other council led interventions – this includes bidding for GHG-LAD funds for SBC owned housing stock.

Objective 11 seeks to encourage emissions reduction from Swindon residents, notably to provide guidance and influence the private sector to improve the efficiency of housing stock.

Please highlight any fuel poverty issues specific to your area.

Swindon is a predominantly urban area, with good access to mains gas and a fairly modern housing stock (it has undergone considerable expansion since the Second World War). This has included a large amount of non-traditional construction properties – around 40% of SBC owned housing stock is non-traditional construction, which presents difficulties when attempting to make these homes energy efficient. The more central and older areas of Swindon consist of solid wall terrace homes which can be difficult and expensive to insulate. In general though, there is scope to improve the energy efficiency of many properties with cost effective measures like cavity wall insulation.

Fuel poverty in this area is more likely the result of financial pressure on households than the result of the energy efficiency of the housing, although this will be contributing in many cases.

What measures or initiatives have you taken to promote fuel cost reduction for those in fuel poverty? Include information on partnerships with local businesses or energy providers you have.

See previous info regarding the Warm & Safe Wiltshire service.

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is an obligation on energy suppliers aimed at helping households cut their energy bills and reduce carbon emissions by installing energy saving measures. Following the Spring 2018 consultation, the Government set out in its response that ECO3 will fully focus on Affordable Warmth – low income, vulnerable and fuel poor households.

The ECO “Local Authority flexible eligibility” (LA Flex) programme allows LAs to make declarations determining that certain households in fuel poverty or with occupants on low incomes and vulnerable to the effects of cold homes, are referred to ECO obligated suppliers for support under the Affordable Warmth element of ECO.

LAs involved in the LA Flex programme are required to issue a Statement of Intent that they are going to identify households as eligible, and the criteria they are going to use; and a declaration that the LA has been consulted on the installation of measures in a home.

Has your local authority published a Statement of Intent (Sol) for ECO flexibility eligibility?

Yes, the link is here:

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5548/statement_of_intent_for_eligibility_f_or_affordable_warmth_grant_version_three

Please answer the following questions to help us to understand LA Flex delivery in more detail:

How many declarations were issued for low income vulnerable households?

2019/2020 33 declarations.
2020/2021 35 declarations.

It should be noted that some households will be both vulnerable and fuel poor, but only one criteria is counted.

How many declarations were issued for Fuel Poor households?

2019/2020 41 declarations.
2020/2021 8 declarations.

It should be noted that some households will be both vulnerable and fuel poor, but only one criteria is counted.

How many declarations were issued for in-fill?

None.

What is the highest income cap published in your Sol?

£30,000.

Smart Metering

Please provide a brief statement outlining your current or planned approach to promote smart meter take up and supporting residents to achieve benefits.

In 2019 SBC was part of a wider Smart Energy GB funded project raising awareness and increasing take-up of smart meters amongst older people. This project covered the Wiltshire Council and also Bath & North East Somerset Council areas as well as Swindon. The project overall reached 25,722 people, with just under 7,000 of these in the target group. Specific targeting for Swindon included information on smart metering being individually shared with Housing Association and Swindon Borough Council tenants who were 65+, and a follow up face to face event, reaching 3,036 residents in the target group.

Please provide further information on activities relating to smart metering:

SBC has a void scheme for its council owned homes, this includes the installation of smart meters where possible.

There is no direct encouragement of smart meters to the general population other than the project in 2019 mentioned above.

The 2021 Home Energy Conservation Act report has been submitted online to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as per their issued HECA 2021 Reporting Guidance. This is a summary version of the report based on the questions asked in the survey. For more information on this report, please contact:

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