

Moving to a low carbon future- local government responsibility in transforming housing

Question & answer session notes

Session one- chaired by Philip Selwood, Chief Executive, Energy Saving Trust

Questions

Councillor Bob Derbyshire, Cardiff County Council

Where can we get more guidance on what can be done through planning, particularly in terms of refurbishment? We need to be able to persuade our planning officers to do these things.

Lee Cecil, National Landlords Association Wales

Landlords will need to produce Energy Performance Certificates from October. Is there a point of contact for advice on improving energy efficiency of their properties?

John Scrimgeour, Wales Audit Office

Are local authorities in the right place to collect data about the private sector stock?

Answers

Mick Bates AM:

In terms of planning, government should provide leadership with policy to support you, but also remember innovation is in your power. The Merton policy was conceived by planning officers in a pub, and ended up being adopted as government policy. A dynamic is needed with internal and external forces coming together. Officers need best advice from organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust and Carbon Trust. Powers in government policy are on the way, in the mean time innovate!

Advice for landlords – the Energy Saving Trust.

Data provision – this is what the Energy Performance Certificates are all about.

Gavin Killip, Oxford University:

It's the planning officer's role to be an expert; the councillors role is to be the custodian of the targets and be "belligerent and bloody minded". Councillors should be saying to planning officers, "don't tell me why it can't be done, tell me how it can be done".

Again, the Energy Saving Trust is the place to go for advice on improving energy efficiency. The landlords energy saving tax allowance allows landlords to write off spend on energy efficiency against tax.

Regarding the local authority role in collecting data about the private sector stock – the private sector must be included in the low carbon agenda, and somebody has to administer the data. Energy Performance Certificate data should be made public; you can find out how much any house in your street sold for online, why shouldn't you be able to find out its energy rating?

Philip Sellwood added:

The Energy Saving Trust is currently working with government to try and get access to energy performance certificate data, but they don't currently plan to make the data public.

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Questions:

Councillor Jonathan Wilson, Caerphilly CBC

Isn't there a danger that developers will neglect Wales between 2011 and 2016 depriving us of desperately needed housing?

Allan Jones, Torfaen CBC

With the planned repeal of the Home Energy Conservation Act, what support will I have for my work with the local authority?

Councillor Stockdale, Vale of Glamorgan Council

We have huge developments happening in our county – Barry Waterfront, St Athan – and our officers tell us there is nothing we can do require sustainable energy at these sites...?

Answers

Mick Bates AM:

I'm not sure that the 2011 target is even achievable, we have good small scale examples but reaching zero carbon housing on a mass scale?

Local development plans should provide policy for change in the future.

On frustrations with influencing these major developments, I agree.

Gavin Kilip:

Wales is too big for developers to ignore!

Repeal of HECA is news to me so I'm afraid I can't comment!

Regarding planning frustrations, I suggest you find people who share your passion and work out how to overcome them.

Session two- chaired by Philip Selwood

Philip Selwood, Energy Saving Trust, advocated a 'can do' attitude towards the low carbon challenge.

Questions

Cllr Anne Gee, Cardiff County Council:

We have a huge student population living in houses of multiple occupation. How can we convince them to save energy? They have lots of gadgets and even if one person in the house is committed, they can't do it alone.

Gavin Killip, Oxford University:

Both schemes used door-knocking, but what other methods were used to reach residents? Why was door-knocking chosen? Also, were there secondary offers to residents not in fuel poverty (as many measures/benefits primarily aimed at fuel poor)?

Question for Neal Parry and Sally Sullivan:

Were measures means-tested?

Sue Ansell, Energy Saving Trust advice centre:

Was there a particular standard that measures were aimed at reaching?

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Answers

Neal Parry, Powys County Council CO2i project:

We need to work on encouraging landlords to apply for measures rather than tenants. CO2i allowed anyone over the age of 18 to access a grant of up to £3,000 and anyone over 60 up to £5,000; there was no differentiation between the fuel rich and the fuel poor.

Lee Cecil, National Landlord's Association Wales, added:

I can be contacted via Bethan Jones at Cardiff County Council. We talk to all the universities in Cardiff who have an officer to facilitate the relationship between students and landlords.

John Scrimgeour, Wales Audit Office:

Identifying the responsible person is very important in identifying the driver for housing improvements. It isn't a priority for students. Landlords need incentives.

Cllr David Lewis, Neath port Talbot Warm Zone:

There were mailshots to all households, followed by door-knocking on a ward-by-ward basis to create a presence and promote the council as a trustworthy installer. Non-responders received a 2nd mailshot with offers of discounted rates for installation of energy saving measures. Non fuel poor residents were also offered discounted rates.

Sally Sullivan, Warm Wales:

All local authority properties had free work. Private properties could get free work if in receipt of qualifying benefits (some of which are means-tested), if fuel poor or over 60. Others could get discounted work.

We aimed for the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.