

HECA Report 2021 Questions (relating to year 20/21)

Note: All questions have a 4000-character limit (Approx. 500 words)

Introductory Questions

- Name of Local Authority - Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Type of Local Authority - Borough
- Name, job title and email address of official submitting report - Alison Amesbury, Head of Housing, alison.amesbury@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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, there are two current strategies: the Carbon Management Plan and the Climate Emergency Response Plan

- **If yes, please provide a link**

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-and-committees/the-climate-emergency/the-climate-emergency.aspx>

- **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?**

Green Homes Grant (LAD)

Over the next two years the council will continue to deliver energy efficiency measures funded through the Green Homes Grant scheme. CWAC was successful in applying to rounds 1a and 1b and will also be delivering measures through Phase 2 and is discussing delivery through LAD3 and HUG.

ECO Flex

The council will continue to offer ECO Flex.

Warm Homes Fund – National Grid

CWAC successfully applied to Category 1 & 3 of National Grid's Warm Homes Fund. Category 1, which supported the installation of first-time gas central heating systems, has just recently come to a close. The Category 3 project (Green Doctor – Energy Efficiency Advisory Scheme) which focuses on all aspects of domestic energy, including advice and guidance on energy efficiency and the installation of small measures, will continue until December 2021.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – the initial wave of funding will be via local authorities and CWAC will look to support the application process.

- **What has been, or will be, the cost(s) of running and administering the scheme(s), such as the value of grants and other support made available, plus any other costs incurred (such as administration) as desired.**

Green Homes Grant scheme (inclusive of capital measures, ancillary works and administration)

- LAD 1a – value of scheme £241,500

- LAD 1b – value of scheme £298,750
- Phase 2 – value of scheme £2.1m

Warm Homes Fund – Category 1 (heating to off-gas properties) Value of scheme £225,000

Warm Homes Fund – Category 3 (Green Doctor Advice Service) Value of scheme £264,650

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

Domestic energy projects are delivered by the council's partner - Qwest Services Ltd. The Green Doctor scheme is administered by Groundwork Cheshire and funded by National Grid.

The Council lead a Borough-wide Affordable Warmth Steering Group which is a multi-agency network to tackle fuel poverty and provide affordable warmth in a coordinated way.

• 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.

Grant funding: Installation of domestic energy efficiency measures.

Green Doctor: advice, behavioural changes, CO2 reduction / savings, bill savings, H&WB

Affordable Warmth Steering Group: networking, collaborative working

There are a mix of intended outcomes from the schemes available to residents within the borough. Across all schemes the installation of energy efficient measures will help reduce domestic carbon emissions, lower energy bills, help reduce fuel poverty levels and improve health and wellbeing, particularly for residents living with health conditions which are exacerbated by living in damp and cold homes.

Communications

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

Yes via a third party provider.

• If yes, please briefly outline how this is undertaken.

The council's Green Doctor scheme provides advice and guidance on all energy related matters including energy efficiency to eligible residents. At present the scheme is only able to carry out a telephone service but should be able to resume home visits soon. During the home visits small measures such as draught-proofing, radiator backing, LED lights and hot water tank jackets are provided.

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

Website information and links; promotion via network partners; direct targeting to households, landlords/letting agents; Climate Emergency newsletter/Landlord Newsletter.

The Council's webpage for advice is: Home Energy help for residents

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/energy/home-energy.aspx>

This lists a wide range of energy assistance schemes for our residents to support them in lowering their energy usage.

This web page also provides signposting to other local and national agencies and schemes for additional support in energy saving advice and measures.

Local Green Supply Chain

Environmental and Sustainability criteria are factored into the procurement and selection process.

- **Have you made any assessment, or undertaken any analysis of the existing capacity in your local energy efficiency retrofit supply chain to support the decarbonisation of buildings by 2050? If Yes, please summarise the outcomes.**

Assessment is being undertaken to ensure compliance with PAS 2035 and PAS 2030:19 for delivery and installation of retrofit measures.

- **What actions are you taking, if any, to upskill and/or grow the local energy efficiency installer supply chain? This could include the facilitation of training, and local installer networking opportunities.**

Providing links and routes to training and upskilling opportunities provided by the Retrofit Academy.

- **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?**

Letters to targeted groups for Green Homes Grant, council website which lists available schemes, Climate Emergency newsletter and the Landlord's newsletter

- **If no action is taking place in either of these two areas, please let us know of any barriers you have encountered.**

N/A

- **How effectively is your LA able to engage (Trustmark/PAS2035/PAS2030 certified) installers?**

Challenges are currently being encountered due to the lack of availability of accredited installers

- **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?**

Residential property makes up 14% of Cheshire West and Chester's greenhouse gas emissions therefore domestic energy efficiency is a key part of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan

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?**

We have installed external wall insulation to all eligible solid wall properties, and have to date installed 199 solar PV systems, 10% of which feature battery storage. We sign off every installation and obtain the relevant certification to ensure quality. We also have a long term proposal for reducing carbon emissions from the homes we manage and are working to mobilise another phase of solar PV which would consist of an estimated 150 addresses

• 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)

We maintain a complete stock condition database with associated property data and have a broad variety of procurement approaches available to us. Our strategies, plans and procedures are appropriately aligned to allow us to pursue sustainability objectives, and we have analysed the overlaps between our carbon emission reduction proposals and the core capital investment plan.

• If no, would it be easy/difficult to obtain this information?

• Have you experienced any challenges to retrofit, including during any previous government schemes you have taken part in (e.g. supply chain, funding, tenant cooperation, mixed tenure, split incentive, policy clarity, etc)? Please provide some detail. Have social housing partners reported any challenges to retrofit?

The main difficulty we have experienced to date is in marrying our sustainability investment plan to funding mechanisms which typically contain narrow criteria for applicable works. We have set out proposals which we feel would most effectively reduce the carbon emissions from our housing stock and ideally would be able to access funding which allows us to pursue these objectives on the combined basis of highest impact and minimising revisits to addresses, but find that we are able to access funding for limited selections of works and for restrictive timescales.

• 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?

Utilising national and local datasets and stock assessment models.

• What considerations would make you more or less likely to apply for government funding? If known, what is the opinion of your social housing partners?

Availability of funding over a longer term to develop programmes rather than short funding bursts with challenging deadlines.

• To what extent are social housing tenants willing or unwilling to undergo retrofit, and what are the barriers and facilitators to their participation? If known, is this the same opinion across all social housing tenants or is it different with HA and ALMO tenants?

We typically don't encounter much resistance, and without having data to back this up it feels that people have become more open to energy upgrades in recent years. We have carried out solar PV projects and EWI projects with essentially no refusals, and the resistance we did meet was related to busy lifestyles and not wanting disruption rather than not wanting the product

- **Does the approach to retrofit change for leaseholders in mixed tenure blocks? What encourages them to co-operate?**

To date we have only worked on tenanted addresses for energy efficiency upgrades, and the detailed plans we have made to blocks so far do not require charging to leaseholders.

Domestic Private Rented Sector (PRS) Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

- **Is your authority aware of the PRS Minimum Efficiency Standards regulations requiring private rentals in England and Wales to meet a minimum energy performance rating of EPC Band E as of April 2020, unless a valid exemption applies?**

Yes, the Council working with colleagues across Strategic Housing and Commissioning, Regulatory Services as well as Qwest Services have promoted the above to the sector via the Council website, email alerts sent to all landlords and letting agents as well as articles in the annual Landlord Newsletter. Qwest Energy have also regularly spoken at the Landlord Forum and a number of energy efficiency providers have had exhibitor stands, the forum typically sees around 60-80 private landlords/letting agents in attendance with minutes being sent out to over 500 landlords and letting agents.

- **Which team within your authority is responsible for, leading on enforcement of the PRS minimum standard? Please provide the contact details of the person leading this team.**

Colleagues in Regulatory Services are responsible for enforcing all housing standards including the PRS minimum standard. The lead contact is Carl Murphy, Senior Regulatory Services Officer.
carl.murphy@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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

Landlords are informed via: the annual Landlord Newsletter; biannual Landlord Forum run in partnership with the Residential National Landlords Association; Council website and finally; direct email alerts. Tenants are informed via designated part of the Council website and via our Better Renting Campaign which is run in partnership with Cheshire West Citizens Advice.

- **What barriers, if any, does your local authority face enforcing these regulations (e.g. identifying non-compliant properties/landlords, budgeting/resourcing, any legal issues)?**

The only barrier is the means to identify those properties that do not meet the regulations.

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

We are not able to directly target the above as there is no means in which to do this however, our approach in promoting the regulations via the above methods is helping to get the message out to the sector of the need to become compliant with the regulations.

Financial Support for Energy Efficiency

Where possible, please set out your answers to the following questions by tenure (owner occupied, privately rented, or social housing).

- 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.

The council's Green Doctor scheme is primarily aimed at owner occupier and private rented residents, but will cover all tenures, and provides advice and guidance on energy efficiency and energy savings within the home. The scheme was a consortium bid with other sub-regional authorities including Cheshire East Council, Warrington Borough Council and Halton Borough Council. The overall budget for delivery of the 18 months scheme is £579,300 which comprises £330,000 grant funding and £249,000 local authority match funding.

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

This is an area we are currently assessing.

Fuel Poverty

- Does your Local Authority have a Fuel Poverty Strategy?

Yes, fuel poverty is accounted for in the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan.

- **What steps have you taken to identify residents/properties in fuel poverty? What blockers, if any, have there been in identifying households in fuel poverty?**

The council's Insight and Intelligence team uses a wide range of data available to help identify and target areas of fuel poverty. Such data includes for example national fuel poverty data published by BEIS, identification of off-gas areas, Indices of Deprivation, Pay Checker, Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) data and health statistic such as percentage of population with long term health implications.

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

The Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan addresses domestic energy efficiency.

- **Please highlight any fuel poverty issues specific to your area.**

The borough of Cheshire West and Chester has a large number of residential park homes. In total there are over 800 parks homes across 29 permanent residential sites, many of which are off the

mains gas network, leading to higher heating costs, inhabited by older residents living on fixed incomes and with multiple health conditions, exacerbated by living in cold, damp homes.

The council is actively looking to address fuel poverty across all permanent park home sites in the borough.

• 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.

An Affordable Warmth Steering Group was set up in Cheshire West in 2010. The group benefits from representation from public sector organisations (local authority and Fire service), third sector organisations (Age UK, Citizens Advice, Groundwork) and local charities. One of the benefits of the group is its ability to raise awareness of, and to sign-post into, one-another's schemes. Over recent years the council has helped raise awareness of funded projects delivered by Groundwork and Citizens Advice for the distribution of pre-payment meter top-up cards for households struggling to afford their energy costs.

ECO Flex

The council offers residents the opportunity to have energy efficiency measures installed helping to reduce the cost of fuel to households classed as living in fuel poverty or at risk of slipping into fuel poverty.

Qwest Energy

In 2017 the council developed a white-label energy product – Qwest Energy. The product is currently operates utilising an Octopus Energy supply licence. As a market leader, the tariffs available from Octopus enable the council to offer competitive rates in addition to acquisition fees being reinvested into fuel poverty projects at a community level.

Green Doctor Scheme

The council's Green Doctor Scheme is funded by National Grid's Warm Home Fund and will operate until December 2021. The scheme is aimed at households living in fuel poverty or at risk of fuel poverty. All households contacting the service will be offered bespoke advice and guidance according to their individual needs, including energy efficiency advice, fuel tariff switching and referral-on for insulation measures. All helping to reduce the cost of energy for a household.

First-time central heating

The council was successful in applying to National Grid's Warm Homes Fund for the installation of a first-time gas central heating system for eligible properties. The properties benefiting from the funding have no full gas central heating system and maybe be using for example expensive electric storage heaters or gas fires, to heat the home.

• Has your Local Authority Participated in GHG: LAD?

Yes

o If yes, please indicate which phase you participated in and briefly outline the project.

The council was successful in an application to both rounds 1a and 1b. The focus of this funding was to offer eligible park homes residents external wall insulation. The offer to residents for Phase 2 funding is still to be confirmed.

o If no, please indicate what barriers prevented you from participation in the scheme.

N/A

• Would your Local Authority be in a position to manage the delivery of upgrades through a scheme such as LAD in 2022?

The Council is currently assessing delivery capacity.

o If yes, please indicate the anticipated number of homes that could be upgraded per year.

Potentially 150

o If no, please indicate what barriers would prevent you from delivering upgrades in your area.

availability of PAS2035 contractors

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

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? 26
- How many declarations were issued for Fuel Poor households? 33
- How many declarations were issued for in-fill?

0

• What is the highest income cap published in your Sol?

£26,000 for family with children

• If you have used an income over £30k gross, what reason have you given? n/a

• Do you charge for declarations to be signed? If so, please state how much?

Not at present but it is being considered.

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.

- The council's domestic energy webpage is to be updated with a link to Smart Energy GB to help promote the benefits of having a smart meter installed.

- articles to feature in the council's Climate Emergency e-newsletter

• Please provide further information on activities relating to smart metering, including but not limited to:

a. Integrating approaches to delivering energy efficiency improvements in residential accommodation

The council has developed a white label - 'Qwest Energy'. This encourages a switch-over to a smart meter for all residents moving over to the Qwest Energy product.

b. Arranging for smart meters to be installed by energy suppliers in vacant social housing premises
- The council's social housing provider arranges for the installation of smart meters when properties become vacant.

c. Using social landlords to promote smart meter uptake

As part of the tenancy support work and induction for new tenants carried out by social landlords, the use of smart meters will be discussed when appropriate. Any promotion would be via social media channels and Housing newsletters.

d. Including smart meters in landlord licencing schemes

There is nothing specific or advisory requirements at present for landlords so this is not something currently addressed through the licencing scheme.

e. Supporting residents who have had appliances condemned for safety reasons

This is an issue for consideration.

Future Schemes and Wider Incentives

• **Please outline any further schemes or wider initiatives not covered above that your local authority has carried out or is planning to undertake to improve energy efficiency in residential accommodation.**

As part of the council's ambitions to tackle the climate emergency a grant based Climate Emergency Fund has been established. The purpose of the fund is to tackle carbon emissions within the borough and applications targeting domestic properties are encouraged. Established community groups are eligible to apply, the scope of which does encompass domestic energy.