

## **Creating warm comfortable homes**

### **Introduction**

In 2013 the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK) investigated the viability of insulating the walls of over 300 Council-owned properties on the Norbiton and Mount Pleasant Estates. The homes were all built in the 1920's with solid brick walls, making them difficult and costly to heat. The conclusion of the investigation was that the insulating materials required for the scheme had become widely available and installation would be possible if adequate funding could be sourced.

The resulting project is part of RBK's Better Homes programme which is a wider initiative across the borough to bring all Council-owned housing up to the 'better homes' standard. This standard is designed to exceed the government's minimum standard for housing (the Decent Homes Standard) and is being achieved by overhauling roofs, replacing windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms, and upgrading heating and ventilation. For tenants, this means warmer, better insulated homes in a reasonable state of repair with more modern facilities.

### **Partnership formation**

To get the project underway, a number of partners were brought together by RBK to ensure that all requirements would be met, and to explore funding options. United Living joined the partnership as the contractor, bringing its local and national experience in refurbishment and energy efficiency solutions to the table. Philip Pank Partnership were appointed as the contract administrators, providing technical and surveying needs. Whilst Landmark Energy were appointed to look at the possible efficiency measures that could be carried out to the properties and look to secure grant funding.

### **Research and Planning**

The initial collaborative research found a potential joint funding source under the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) grant. It was noted that a lot of publicity had already surrounded the Government's latest energy-efficiency funding programme, known as 'Green Deal'. Most of the emphasis had been placed on how this can help the private residential sector to reduce energy use. By contrast, very little had been said about the support that social housing providers can receive through an ECO grant, a sub-section of the Green Deal. Therefore, EDF Energy were consulted by the partnership and became closely involved in the project to oversee the administration and delivery of the works subject to the ECO grant.

Whilst RBK's Better Homes programme is also being funded by other Government grants, it acts as the generator of ECO funds from EDF by 'buying forward' long-term carbon emissions savings that will be made by the project, with the final amount received to depend upon the contractors (United Living's) progress of completions.

### **Collaborative Approach and Methodology**

Following agreement and approval of the core ECO grant, a steering group was appointed which is made up of senior representatives from each participating organisation. They are:

- Peter Williams, Landmark Energy, Energy Consultants & Project Managers
- Paul Dunkerton, Kingston Council Contracts Manager
- David Woolmer, Kingston Council Better Homes Delivery Manger
- Steve London, Kingston Council Technical Officer
- Neil Vandenberghe, United Living Contract Manager
- Kevin Jones, United Living Operation Director
- Mark Dallen, EDF Business Development Account Manager
- Keith Cullen, EDF Energy Efficiency Project Manager

With various stakeholders looking for different outcomes, regular operations meetings were established with the team to develop strong working relationships and help to manage any potential issues. These regular updates and the collaborative approach have helped to establish a multi-partner culture and philosophy across the project.

From the initial briefing meeting, the project team grasped the magnitude of the task ahead and the importance to the employer of being able to secure the pre-agreed grant funding. This mutual goal and understanding helped to shape their response at the outset with all key players putting the scheme at the centre of their approach, collectively finding reasons to move forward.

The turnaround time was hugely demanding with a pressing need to achieve the number of completed units that were pre-agreed with EDF in order to secure the grant income at the rates set

under a strict process. The initial works required pre-start surveys from two separate consultants, site surveys and a very stringent timetable for assembling and submitting the necessary paperwork to EDF without which the grant cannot be paid.

From the first meeting between the partnership organisations and EDF, the team were able to get the scheme mobilised and the service provider was able to secure the necessary supply chain in record time – none of which would have been possible without working together with a spirit of mutual co-operation.

### **Delivery under TPC2005**

Over a two year period (completion is due in March 2016), this project has been delivered under TPC2005, which has helped the partnership to generate significant cost and time savings through a two-stage procurement process. TPC2005 has helped the team identify carbon reduction and energy efficiency measures. This approach has also proved extremely effective with the contractual and conditional local employment skills that many residents have engaged in.

With the flexibility of the Price Framework, set out under the TPC2005, the team were able to acclimatise to the pace required in getting the scheme to site. The partnership methodology enshrined in the contract allowed a truly collaborative approach, which helped to manage the complexities of the multi-party survey and verification processes required by EDF.

The refurbishment works were split between two workstreams that ran concurrently with each other. The works completed across both workstreams included the following:

- new kitchens and bathrooms, heating and electrical works, associated building works, asbestos surveys and removal, OT Bathrooms, window replacement, roof replacements/repairs, external decorations, communal landscaping, whole house refurbishment including damp works, and conversions of houses to accommodate larger families.

Once EDF Energy, in partnership with the Council's energy consultants, Landmark Energy, had put together a funding package, the work was able to commence in July 2014. The solid walls in each property were clad with 90mm thick insulating slabs over which a waterproof render was laid in a white finish. This effectively reduces heat loss from the walls fivefold and gives the same thermal efficiency as the more common cavity-wall insulation. Not only that, the properties look better and require less maintenance.

## **Challenges**

As the works have progressed, a number of measures have been implemented to mitigate health and safety risks. For instance, due to the large number of young children living in or near to the work areas, the project site team took charge of delivering health and safety talks, construction taster days and supervised site visits. To prevent unauthorised access to scaffolding the team also arranged for extra Heras fence protection.

When undertaking whole property refurbishment works the site team conducted up-front surveys, designs and colour choice selection to mitigate the delays caused by decanting residents. The partnership approach helped to support the decant process by making provisions to conduct repairs in properties where residents were due to move – proactively preventing delays to the programme.

## **Achievements to Date**

By July 2015, over 130 properties had received external wall insulation and many of them have also been refurbished as part of the Council's ongoing 'Decent Homes' programme. New windows, doors, kitchens and bathrooms are transforming these homes into modern comfortable places to live. Work will carry on until 2017 and the intention is to roll-out the benefits to other wards within the Borough.

Since this partnership started on the works, the average SAP rating (the Government's measure of energy-efficiency) of Kingston's 5,000 council-owned properties has increased from 62 to 70. That's a saving of around 5,000 tonnes per year of carbon emissions, mainly carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). The target is to achieve an average SAP rating of 75 by 2017 which is very much dependant on the council ability to fund works and to secure future grants.

The team managed a demanding protocol on behalf of the grant funders, working to very tight and strict timetables and around residents in occupation, whilst maintaining the highest standards of resident liaison.

Added value has been achieved by extensive involvement with the local community. This has included:

- Attendance at the Malden Manor Fun Day fun day and contribution of raffle prizes together with hand out packs

- Holding construction taster days
- Providing work experience placements for local students
- Employing three apprentices as part of the partnership's social value commitment.
- Delivering Women into construction and apprenticeship pathway discussions at Nescot College

To date the team has made over £39,000 of cash and non-cash contributions to the Kingston Community.

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