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24

# housing

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## Housing USA

stateside reform

John Healey  
at the helm of a new era

Teen parents  
fostering independence in Manchester

Profile – Gail Biggerstaff  
“The Whirlwind” on her new role

## Should social landlords be doing more to meet the Government's energy efficiency targets?



**Ken Mantock**  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT, MEARS GROUP

It is too easy to assume that once the Government has set targets for energy efficiency and carbon reduction that everyone will then fall in behind and deliver the goods.

Social landlords, just like the rest of us, whether we act as individuals or through our roles in business or the Third Sector, need not only targets but information, support and the wherewithal to make a difference in tackling global warming.

This is not a call for extra cash, though I know many social landlords would appreciate it, but rather an observation that in the chase for significant energy efficiency improvements the Government, through the various bids organised by its departments and agencies, has focused on cutting edge ideas rather than more widely enabling the roll-out of established ones.

It is accepted that energy efficiency, carbon reduction and residents' comfort of their homes can be vastly improved by better insulation, more fuel efficient heating and smart metering systems. To this mix can be added simple aerated taps, dual flush WC cisterns and rain and grey water harvesting.

Enough is now surely known about the cost/benefits of all of these and others like solar power and ground and air source heat pumps to promote knowledge, funding and installation of them under a next generation Decent Homes programme rather than yet more rounds of competitions, trials and one-off bids for new technologies?

If the current process means that the benefits of even newer technological expertise and ideas are only rolled forward and in the meanwhile vast numbers of homes go unimproved through non implementation of accepted technologies, surely the causes of energy efficiency and all those who wish for better housing are being ill-served? ■



**Jim Vine**  
HEAD OF PROGRAMME, BUILDING AND SOCIAL HOUSING FOUNDATION

Yes, social landlords should be doing more – but it is not just up to them. Everyone across the housing system needs to do more to ensure that we reduce our carbon emissions by 80% before 2050. Achieving this reduction will require action from everyone: from central government to tenants, from the volume house builders to individual owner occupiers. We must work together to turn the whole of the housing system green.

ENDING FUEL POVERTY IS A SERIOUS POSSIBILITY THAT WOULD IMPROVE THE HEALTH...OF OVER 5M HOUSEHOLDS.

Improving the energy efficiency of housing stock would reduce the fuel bills of every resident but would have the greatest impact for the most vulnerable people in our society, many of whom live in social housing. Ending fuel poverty is a serious possibility that would improve the health and well being of over five million households.

Improving energy efficiency would also create jobs for a construction industry that has been hit hard by the current economic situation. The Federation of Master Builders estimates that refurbishment of existing stock could be a £6.5 billion per year opportunity for the construction industry.

Three key areas need further development: viable financial models, workforce skills and the construction models. Finance is a particular barrier for social landlords that must be addressed quickly. Tenants in energy efficient housing will be paying less on their energy bills. Therefore, should we allow social landlords to increase rents to improve energy efficiency? ■



**Mash Halai**  
PARTNER (MEMBER), JOHN ROWAN & PARTNERS

I think it is not necessarily a case of 'should' they do more, but one of 'can' they do more. Social landlords are already achieving much higher energy efficiency standards than that of many local authorities and private developers. They are already meeting the Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 as a minimum and many are already striving to meet level 4.

The real question is one of cost and how social landlords are expected to meet these targets while delivering the best value for the taxpayer and remaining financially stable. It seems that the HCA wants more for less (higher standards for smaller grants). Unless the Government is prepared to provide more funding or make it easier for them to borrow from the banks, it will be difficult for social landlords.

The Government should also be focusing more closely on the UK's existing housing stock. According to the Powering our Lives report from the Government think tank Foresight, energy to power UK buildings accounts for 50% of all UK carbon emissions. Reducing this consumption, by making the UK's housing more energy efficient, should therefore be the first step in meeting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets. 85% of today's homes will still be around in 2050 and by then we will need to have cut our carbon emissions by 80%. It is clear that if we don't tackle the energy efficiency of existing housing stock, we are unlikely to meet the target.

There are many cost effective areas that social landlords can focus on, such as the use of recycled materials and the effective minimisation of waste. The public sector can take the lead and prove to private developers that energy efficient housing can be built cost effectively. But only with the appropriate levels of properly targeted funding. ■