Visit to Peabody Thamesmead (Condensation, Damp and Mould Strategy)

Date: 30 November 2018

Time: 10.30am – 1.30pm

Location: Thamesmead, Information Hub (DA18 4DR)

Attendees:

- **Caroline Russell**, Chair, Environment Committee
- **Leonie Cooper,** Deputy Chair, Environment Committee
- Secretariat staff, committee officers and Group researchers

Meeting:

- **Nadira** (Senior Sustainability Officer, Peabody)
- **Ben** (Switchee)
- **Peter** (Aereco)

Background

As part of the committee's investigation into cold and damp homes in London, the committee went to visit Thamesmead to hear about their condensation, damp and mould strategy. Peabody acquired Thamesmead in 2014 and announced a regeneration programme to be delivered over thirty years. The £2m Condensation, Damp and Mould (CD&M) Strategy was designed to manage condensation and mould, and increase the affordability of heating in homes that may not be part of a refurbishment programme for several years.

The visit

During the visit, the Assembly members and other attendees heard a briefing about the condensation, damp and mould strategy and then went to visit two homes which had benefited from the implementation of various of the strategy's measures.

The briefing was split into four parts: an explanation of how the strategy was developed, then a talk about each of the three main interventions; energy and ventilation advice and support, installation of a Switchee smart heating control and installation of mechanical demand controlled extract ventilation.

Development of the strategy

Thamesmead had a significant condensation, damp and mould problem. The replacement of the original district heating with individual heating systems, coincided with a large gas increase. It was suggested this may have been a contributing factor to the damp and mould problems first arising. A stock condition survey determined that 18 percent of homes likely had damp and mould issues. The average spend to mould wash and redecorate a home is £1275.

The stock was first risk assessed using the available data, such as the number or rooms, location of the home and number of people living in each home. This was followed by a

survey which was sent out to residents. From the results of the risk assessment, homes were split into low, medium and high risk to determine which measures would be most appropriate.

Energy and ventilation advice

Energy and ventilation advice was provided to every home, whether their risk was deemed to be low, medium or high. Each home received one or two visits from the home energy advice team who work with residents in fuel poverty in the household by providing tailored advice. The team found that there were problems with both overheating and underheating homes and that often plug in heaters were being used. During the visits, standard advice about how to heat homes most efficiently was provided but also a lot of work was done with residents on income maximisation, such as establishing eligibility for grants and checking which tariffs residents were on for energy and water usage. The hope is that savings made will help residents maintain a sufficient level of heating in their homes. 202 households saved £211 on average as a result of the energy advice visits through behaviour change and tariff switches.

Switchee smart heating control

Switchee smart heating controls were installed in some participating homes. Switchee was designed specifically for social housing; it works regardless of whether residents have access to a secondary smart devise such as a phone or Wifi. The devise collects data about the household's living style which would impact the levels of heating and moisture in the home, such as how long the house is occupied through the day or typical cooking and showering routines. This data can then be used to adjust the heating levels and schedules to best fit the household's schedule. The devise also learns how quickly each homes takes to warm up so it can inform residents of the difference between how long heating is set to be on for and how quickly it really takes to heat the home. This could lead to savings for the household. The devise can also track analytics to provide alerts to residents or housing associations if intervention is necessary.

Demand controlled ventilation

Demand controlled ventilation was installed in all medium and high risk homes. The committee learnt that typically ventilation systems are installed to respond to the expected occupancy levels of a home. However, as many homes in London are over-occupied, ventilation systems need to be able to cope with occupancy levels rather than the number of bedrooms in order to be effective. The committee also heard that often, ventilation systems are switched off as they are noisy or have a cost implication. The demand controlled ventilation systems installed as part of the Thamesmead CDM strategy are mechanical. Hydroscopic nylon strips in the devise is humidity sensitive, it reacts to the levels of moisture in the home and expands or contracts to increase or decrease ventilation as necessary. As this is an automatic, mechanical reaction, rather than an electrically powered, there is no cost associated with the ventilation and so fuel poor residents have no incentive to switch it off. The fan is also very quiet so residents are not disturbed by any noise.

Visiting households

Following the briefing, the Members visited two households which participated in the strategy. One home had received all the interventions and one home had received the energy advice and the demand controlled ventilation. During the visit, the Members were shown around the home by the residents and were able to speak to the residents to find out how the interventions had changed the condition of the property. Both homes had the new mechanical demand controlled ventilation installed in the kitchen and bathroom as well as a few inches shaved off from the bottom of the doors to encourage air flow between rooms. The residents we met were happy with the improvements they experienced in their homes and Members were encouraged by how warm and dry the homes felt.