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Q&A

WITH IAN DALGLEISH, INVESTMENT PLANNING OFFICER, TOWER HAMLETS HOMES

Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) which manages 22,000 homes on behalf of Tower Hamlets Council. 700 of the 22,000 homes are street properties, but the greater proportion of the housing stock is medium to high rise flats, and many of their homes are leasehold.

THH see retrofit as a vital part of their activities, helping to minimise the impact of austerity and welfare reform on their residents, primarily by reducing fuel bills. And with £180 million to invest on 13,500 homes over five years as part of the Decent Homes programme they are looking to demonstrate value for money to their stakeholders by carrying out retrofit works alongside external repairs.

THH have been working with the RE:NEW Support Team since August 2014.

We spoke to Ian to find out how he is making the most of the free consultancy available.

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“RE:NEW have really helped with our investment planning for retrofitting our assets and we’ve seen improvements across the board as a result. Having the data for cost/benefit analysis, and the expertise to help you interpret it, on the other end of the phone at any time has been wonderful.”

**Ian Dalglish,
Investment Planning Officer**

What benefits have you found from working with the RE:NEW Support Team?

I have been using the services of the RE:NEW team since August – when I found out that the service was available I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. To have access to FREE consultancy is fantastic – it’s like Christmas. Also, to have access to a menu of services that I can pick and choose from provides the flexibility I need.

Our RE:NEW Engagement Manager, Matt Cotton, has worked with us to develop specifications, advised on procurement and preparation for tenders. Having his knowledge and expertise on hand has helped to validate our approach to existing projects and to shape projects which are in the pipeline. To add to this his in-depth technical knowledge has been extremely helpful.

What challenges do you face installing domestic retrofit to your homes?

One of our key challenges is planning. We have to respect and conserve the historical character of our stock, which of course has implications for measures like External Wall Insulation (EWI). For example, the Planners wanted us to install brick slips to ground floors of blocks – these can take a long time to manufacture and they have increased the costs of works which were already expensive.

We have also had to dedicate a lot of time and energy to securing ECO funding, and we have seen the value of this funding dwindle since the projects were first conceived. It has proved a real challenge to cope with increases in costs and decreases in funding rates! There are significant technical challenges to installing EWI – designing the insulation around the myriad services mounted on the blocks whilst maintaining the performance of the system and ensuring the finished product looks good is a difficult balancing act.

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What support is the RE:NEW team providing?

We are working with RE:NEW on a number of schemes including; EWI to 350 homes on our Bancroft and Avebury estates, external works to 130 homes at Brodick House including EWI, a new flat roof, new windows and the replacement of old electric storage heaters with a new communal gas heating system, and a programme of hard-to-treat cavity wall insulation to 560 homes.

Using their knowledge of the retrofit market the RE:NEW team has helped us to evaluate value for money regarding proposals that we receive from suppliers, and they are providing valuable technical support and procurement advice on new proposals for heat metering.

They have also provided assistance with procuring energy data analysis services for our assets. Following this exercise the RE:NEW team will be assisting us with developing a strategy to meet our objectives of combatting fuel poverty and reducing CO₂ emissions. Once the data exercise is complete we will also be able to model different scenarios in our Asset Management system Keystone, helping us put together retrofit programmes for the future after our Decent Homes programme has finished.

How has your work with RE:NEW enhanced your wider asset management and repairs and maintenance strategy?

The collaborative work with RE:NEW has real potential to enhance our strategy because it will give us the insight to see which measures will have the most favourable impacts on our stock, helping us to understand our asset performance and the scope for improvements. It also has the potential to ease the pressure on our responsive maintenance budgets by reducing the risk of condensation in many of our homes.

What advice would you give to other organisations looking to undertake their own retrofit programmes?

It's really important to get to know your stock and how your assets are performing – the sooner the better. It will give you a good indication of where the real needs are and where installing measures will be most cost effective. It can also help you to put together funding bids or business cases for approval in a shorter space of time. You also need to appreciate the technical challenges to installing measures and have a good understanding of the products on the market that can help you to overcome some of these challenges.

Also, I'd say it's really a good idea to 'piggy-back' on existing capital programmes to bring your costs down. Why pay for scaffolding if it's already going under another budget?

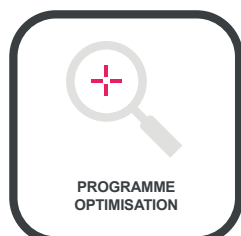
Finally, you will need to be flexible and patient. There are many external factors which can affect your programmes with the funding regime, government policy and legislation, and the supply of labour and materials being good examples. The key word here is 'change'. You need to be able to see the changes coming, assess the risks to delivering your programme and be able to adapt to them.

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RE:NEW provides a highly skilled and experienced Support Team which offers FREE support to social landlords and mixed tenure schemes to increase the scale of domestic retrofit.

The support is tailored to each organisation and comprises:

- a review of retrofit potential
- formulation of retrofit projects
- funding and procurement advice
- support through the procurement process



The RE:NEW Support Team are working with organisations across London to help cut carbon emissions and reduce fuel poverty by enabling more domestic retrofit projects.

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