The London Borough of Croydon has devised an ambitious plan to deliver up to £42m of domestic energy retrofit measures. We spoke to Robert Hunt, Asset Team Manager, to see how the plan is going.
1 What are your key challenges for the next three years?

The Council is committed to ensuring that all our tenants have safe, decent homes and to reducing fuel poverty. Financial uncertainty, combined with a potential reduction in the overall Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from legislative changes, are some of our key challenges. The Housing and Planning Act has come into place so we need to start bringing that into our thinking. For example, the one per cent rent reduction will have an effect on our budgets. We also need to maintain our existing stock to Decent Homes standard while focusing resources on some large-scale works on some of our tower blocks.

2 How did you hear about RE:NEW?

RE:NEW contacted us directly. We were interested in finding out more and started a dialogue with the team to find out how we might benefit from the services they offer.

3 What was the project?

The project seeks to improve the energy efficiency of Croydon’s housing stock over the next five years through a combination of existing planned works (boiler, window and roof replacements) and energy efficiency measures that have been identified through working with the RE:NEW Support Team. We’ll be fitting loft insulations, boiler replacements, solar panels and so on.

4 Why was the project needed?

The main focus is to improve the energy efficiency of our stock, to bring all properties up to a minimum standard of 69 Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating. We also looked to identify how we could improve year on year, highlighting the costs associated with doing so. By improving the energy efficiency of our stock we will help to reduce fuel poverty across the borough.

5 What support has the RE:NEW Support Team provided?

RE:NEW informed us about Carbon Reduction Options for Housing Managers (CROHM) retrofit stock assessments. The RE:NEW team went through our existing energy information, conducting a detailed analysis of our stock’s energy efficiency, and discussed setting targets as part of the CROHM report so we could ensure the project delivers the maximum outcomes.

We also analysed where improving the energy efficiency of the project could improve SAP ratings. The main aim of this was to highlight where we could best use our resources to maximise the increase in SAP. The report identified that loft insulation and boiler replacements would make the biggest improvement and were the most efficient way to increase SAP ratings.

We analysed the implementation standards of the boiler delivery programme. We combined boiler replacements with an assessment of loft insulation, and we targeted loft insulation top-ups where we found them to be low. Although we were initially focused on boiler age we later placed more emphasis on the lowest rated boilers. We are currently looking at a number of different factors, other than the age of the boiler, to design our approach.
We also used RE:NEW’s technical expertise and guidance to help with procuring a new planned maintenance and improvement contract. RE:NEW looked at the specifications that are put into the tender documents for long-term partnering contracts. This was for general building works contracts, windows, mechanicals (heating), lifts and electrical measures. RE:NEW were involved with making sure our tender specifications covered energy efficiency improvement and this became part of any contracts awarded. They also helped assess tender submissions.

**Please explain the process you went through?**

The first step was for RE:NEW to review our energy information to make sure it was suitable for CROHM analysis. We then went on to the CROHM analysis itself, which was carried out by Parity Projects. We had several progress meetings to ask questions around housing strategies, discuss energy efficiency targets and ensure expectations were being managed.

Following the CROHM analysis, RE:NEW helped prepare an executive summary to include in our invitations to tender for general building works. So far we have mobilised one of the four successful contractors, with the other three starting in April 2017. We will be able to embed our learning from CROHM into those contracts.

**What challenges did you face in taking the project forward?**

The initial review and then the CROHM process raised several questions about the information we hold and how we collect it, specifically around the details of the boilers in our properties such as make and model. The main challenge was to capture and share the right level of detail for analysis and programming purposes.

**What advice would you give to other housing organisations looking to increase the energy efficiency of stock?**

Ensure that you are holding accurate and up-to-date information around existing energy efficiency measures so you can make the right decisions on a timely basis.

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

The work we have done with RE:NEW has made us target our resources in the right areas so we are maximising the return on our investment in energy efficiency. For example, the CROHM analysis has helped us to ensure that we are holding accurate data and then using that information to programme works on criteria other than boiler age, for example boiler efficiency. This means that we are maximising the SAP rating and energy efficiency of our stock, which has reduced fuel poverty amongst our residents. RE:NEW’s work has been excellent and I would recommend CROHM analysis combined with RE:NEW’s programme optimisation work as a means of improving the programming of works and ultimately their efficiency and effectiveness.

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