

Domestic Energy Efficiency Advice Code of Practice Local Authority Case Study

When Paul Maplethorpe joined Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in 1998, he was presented with a blank sheet on which to develop the local authority's HECA activities. Coming from an installer background, with a close involvement in HEES (as Warm Front was then known), Paul knew that good advice to the public about energy efficiency was key.

A second member of staff soon joined the HECA team, and together they audited homes, issued questionnaires and gave presentations. Front line Council staff underwent City & Guilds training, and local residents were given access to grant funding through national and regional schemes. A local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC) was opened in 2000, which helped to develop the work yet further.

Paul heard about the Code of Practice through the Energy Advice Providers Group of the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes¹, who were responsible for the inception and development of the Code. Paul was invited to join the group as a local authority representative in 2003, just prior to the Code's official launch, and he immediately saw the benefits. "The Code of Practice endorses what we were already trying to do," says Paul, "but now consistent and accurate advice comes with a national guarantee."

Paul faced no internal barriers to signing up to the Code of Practice, and had the full support of his manager. The process, though time consuming, was not difficult and he was able to show the Council was compliant in three categories of advice: Face-to-Face Not in the Home (e.g. at exhibitions, drop-in centres, etc), Non Face-to-Face (e.g. over the phone or in writing) and Advice in the Home.

"Some local authorities trying to sign up may perceive barriers within their organisation," says Paul, "but many of the procedures needed for the Code are often already in place on a wider scale. Take our complaints procedure for example. There's already a Council wide policy, and if there were any complaints

about the advice that we give, it would be passed down to me to deal with."

The Code of Practice gave the HECA team at Rotherham MBC an opportunity to assess their practices. One improvement, for example, has been to send out short follow-up questionnaires to people a few weeks after they receive advice to see if they found it helpful and if they've taken any action. Careful wording, and the use of Council letterhead, has helped to provide a 50% return of these questionnaires, which help to further improve the service that the Council offers.

The HECA team have their own operations manual so that anyone could join and understand what to do. The Code of Practice has been included in this to ensure that the standards are not lost. Paul promotes the fact that the Council are compliant with the Code both to the people he advises, and internally within the local authority.

"The Code of Practice offers people security in the advice we provide – be they Council officers, tenants, or other householders," says Paul. "It's tangible evidence that advice is reliable and constant. Other local authorities would benefit in similar ways to signing up to the Code – or from making sure that the advice agencies that they use do so."



Paul Maplethorpe giving non face-to-face advice at Rotherham MBC

For more information about the Code of Practice, visit www.goodenergyadvice.org.uk or call 08700 667 620.

¹ See www.est.org.uk/partnership