
Promoting gas safety: Norwich City Councils innovative approaches to promoting gas safety for all, and raising awareness for the next generation

1 Where are we now?

Background

What have we done?

Norwich City Council takes its responsibilities as a landlord in relation to gas safety extremely seriously. We have come a long way within the last few years, and we are now in a position where we consider ourselves to be leading the way with some innovative new approaches to raising awareness about gas safety. We have worked closely with our tenants and leaseholders on several new initiatives, all of which have been highly successful, and we have worked closely with the Gas Safe Register, local schools and our contractor to bring these projects to fruition. We believe that our ongoing work and commitment to gas safety as outlined in this report, makes us an ideal candidate to be considered for the award.

Our website

On 1st November 2011, Norwich City Council launched its new website for tenants and leaseholders of Norwich City Council. This website, designed purely to promote gas safety and awareness, and for all gas related enquiries, gave tenants and leaseholders the opportunity for the first time to make contact online about their heating issues, and a place to find advice on gas safety, as well as providing advice on fuel poverty. Tenants and leaseholders use the site to report non-urgent repairs, give customer feedback on the service they receive and make contact to arrange appointments and request call-backs.

The website also gives important information, advice and updates on gas safety, as well as outlining the legal responsibilities of landlords and giving key contact numbers. We also use the site to promote any events that we are running, and any success stories we have to share.

The joint Gasway and Norwich City Council website has been designed specifically for our 15,500 tenants and 2,500 leaseholders, and is only for gas and heating related issues and advice, and is independent from any other Norwich City Council or contractor website. We worked closely with both tenant and leaseholder groups on layout and content. It has received our all-important 'tenant tick' of approval from our tenants City Wide Board, underlining its simplicity and user-friendliness.



We have promoted our website in a range of different publications, including our tenant and leaseholder magazine (TLC), our own Norwich City Council website, our contractor's website, and via a range of letters and leaflets to our residents.

Our software developers are currently working on a specification for an 'app' to accompany our gas website, that customers will be able to use to access services through their Smart phones – enabling them to report repairs and contact us easily whilst on the move, and thus allowing for people's ever busier lifestyles.

Dariusz Kusiak, vice Chair of Catton Resident Association, and member of the tenants CityWide Board says:

"Gas safety and being able to report our repairs easily is important issue for tenants and leaseholders in Norwich.

When the Norwich Tenants' CityWide Board (CWB) was told of the project to build a partnership website with Gasway, we (the CWB) thought it was important to be involved with the project to ensure a website was built with tenants and leaseholders in mind.

Through working with Norwich City Council and Gasway, we were able to produce a website that was simple to use, had clear safety messages and could report a repair instantly. I am very proud of what we have achieved and I found it a pleasure to work with the officers that involved us in this project."

Check out the website at www.Gasway-NorwichCityCouncil.co.uk

Our special offers for leaseholders

Norwich City Council understands the importance of promoting gas safety and awareness for our residents who have purchased their own flat. We have listened to the safety concerns of our tenants who occupy flats within towers and blocks, who naturally are concerned that leaseholder's properties are gas safe, and have worked closely with our new gas contractor Gasway to offer a special deal for Norwich City Council leaseholders. Gasway, who carries out gas and solid fuel safety inspections, annual servicing and repairs on behalf of the council, offers competitive prices for city council leaseholders on a range of gas central heating services and products.

Gasway offers three different packages for leaseholders. SilverStar, GoldStar and PlatinumStar packages, which feature an annual boiler and appliance service with safety checks, priority breakdown visits, no callout charges, and all the parts and labour necessary within the boiler casing. Customers are also guaranteed same day service, an instant response call centre and a landlord's gas safety certificate for a discounted annual charge. They also offer a standard annual gas safety inspection for a one-off payment in line with our advantageous contract rates.



We have designed and rolled out an associated leaflet specifically for leaseholders, and have promoted the special rates during road show events, in a flyer that was posted out with the leaseholder annual service charges, and also in various publications, including our tenant and leaseholder magazine, our new joint website, and the Norwich City Council website.

Kevin Hayes, Chair of the Norwich Leaseholders Association says:

"I believe the work done by the tenants and leaseholders in conjunction with Gasway and the Council has resulted in a clear, informative and easy to use web-site. I also think that the advantageous rates offered by Gasway to leaseholders represent a good deal.

I hope that those leaseholders who currently do not legally require a gas safety certificate will, in the overall interests of safety in their blocks, use this opportunity to obtain one. "

Mrs. P. King, a Norwich City Council leaseholder has taken out one of the reduced rate plans on offer exclusively to our leaseholders. She says:

"The plan offers good value for money and excellent peace of mind. I know that I am safe and have nothing to worry about."

Our work with the Gas Safe Register

Norwich City Council has worked closely with the Gas Safe Register on a number of projects, including the work we have been doing with local high schools, and on initiatives we have done for the elderly. We ran events during Gas Safety Week in conjunction with the Gas Safe Register (see events and roadshows).



They have been actively involved in our work with local schools, and as well as their attendance and participation in the events delivered to the students, they will be delivering presentations aimed solely for the parents, guardians and carers during follow up parents evenings after the event.



Sally Gillies, Senior Marketing Executive for the Gas Safe Register says:

"Gas Safety Week was a tremendous opportunity to get gas safety messages out to the public, and the support of other organisations such as Norwich City Council was a valuable addition as they have strong relationships with their local community and access to a variety of communication channels"

Our events and roadshows

We have run a number of roadshows and events to promote gas safety, including events during Gas Safety Week, resulting in a half page article (including photos) which featured in the official Gas Safe Register Magazine (issue 32, November 2011).

The events in Gas Safety Week were organised jointly with our contractor Gasway, and we publicised them in a local radio advertising campaign, in local newspapers, and in articles on both our contractor's and Norwich City Council's website.

We have attended a number of local events, including a festival held in the summer for the city's residents. This festival, which was hosted in an area heavily populated with Norwich City Council tenants and residents



alike, and organised by residents of the area, is always a great success, with thousands of visitors every year.

Gasway and its suppliers supported us at this event, and although it was a 'fun event' the opportunity to engage with residents regarding gas safety was not overlooked. We had many visitors to the stand including the Lady Mayor, and local residents asked many relevant questions relating to gas safety. The event Secretary Kevin Wyer was quick to thank us for our support and commended us for the good work we are doing in the community. The importance of gas safety was prominent at this event, and will continue to be in the future.



In the summer of 2011, Gasway and Norwich City Council took the 'gas safe' message into our local communities. A series of ten community road shows were arranged visiting key postal zones across the Norwich City Council boundaries. Community halls, shopping precincts and other local venues were selected to ensure everyone had the opportunity to 'meet the contractor' and discuss any gas safety issues or concerns that they had. The event was an overwhelming success, the turnout exceeded our expectation, and the feedback from those who visited was very positive and will be repeated again next year. Along with some fun hand-outs, everyone who we spoke to took away with them some key safety leaflets, important contact phone numbers and an increased knowledge of gas safety.

Liam Betts, Managing Director for Gasway says:

"Working in and with the local communities, makes a difference. We continue to work with Norwich City Council every step of the way to ensure the gas safety message is at the forefront of everything we do, as this increases safety awareness and improves performance."

Our work with local schools



We have worked closely with local schools in order to engage with the younger generation, and raise gas safety awareness for all.

In conjunction with our contractor Gasway, we are delivering a series of presentations in local high schools. We delivered a presentation in November at Sewell Park Academy, which is one of the largest high schools within the Norwich city boundaries.

This presentation was delivered to 150 year 7 students, and provided an insight as to where gas comes from, as well as some exciting demonstrations, including showing how carbon monoxide is produced, and the dangers of liquid petroleum gas.



Our presentations cover a range of safety issues, and we rolled out a competition to the students to design a gas safety poster. The posters were judged by the Leader of Norwich City Council, Councillor Brenda Arthur, Mr. Derrick Rust-Andrews, director of Gasway, Mr. Stuart Wright, head of science at Sewell Park Academy, and Norwich City Council's director of regeneration and development, Mr. Jerry Massey, with book vouchers as prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place.

The school followed up our presentation with a lesson plan, designed solely around the material we had delivered, with safety information and materials, along with a copy of the presentation being sent home to parents.



Winners of the competition will be featured in our TLC magazine, on the NCC website, our contractor's website, and on our gas website for tenants and leaseholders. The winning design will be used as the cover of our next gas safety leaflet that goes out to all 15,500 tenants, and will be used to promote future gas events.

Teachers from Sewell Park College, including Mr. Stuart Wright, Head of Science say:

"Good presentation, I am surprised at the amount the students took in from it."

"Students clearly had learnt a lot from what they were putting in their posters and the detail of the flames."

"If we get one student to think about this and avoid it then it has been worth while".

"This would be really useful for 6th formers who are going off to university and renting properties."

Our work with the vulnerable and the elderly

It is important to reach everyone when discussing the serious issue of gas safety. We have 26 sheltered schemes across the city, and we appreciate that these residents do not always find it as easy to attend events and road shows that we hold in the general community.

We have started to roll out a series of events for the elderly, and these have been done in conjunction with the Gas Safe Register. Our first 'tea party' event was held at our Alfred Nicholls Court sheltered scheme in September 2011, and was a roaring success! We talked with the residents about the importance of gas safety over tea and cake, and some fun games with prizes!

The prizes ranged from energy saving light bulbs, water saving devices, and power downs; however we also had some great prizes donated to us from the Gas Safe Register, which included important safety information and carbon monoxide detectors.

Rani, manager of the Norwich Silver Rooms Day Centre says:

"The tenants of Alfred Nicholls Court and service users at Silver Rooms thoroughly enjoyed the tea party. They felt the information provided re-enforced and updated gas safety issues. They enjoyed the quiz and also thought the freebies given were good."

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Innovation

Question 1

What is innovative about the service provided?

Our housing property services team, who is responsible for the day to day management of the gas servicing, repairs and maintenance contracts, strive to be innovative in everything that we do.

Since a total restructure in 2006, we have increased the number of properties with a current gas safety certificate year on year to 99.88%, with the remaining 0.12% currently being monitored by our neighbourhood team, and awaiting court action for legal entry. We believe this steady position, held for nearly 4 years now, has been made possible by continually looking for different and innovative ways to involve and engage with tenants, leaseholders, and the community as a whole,

to ensure that everyone understands the importance of allowing access, and the dangers of unsafe gas appliances.

We believe that our gas website and the work that we have done, and will continue to do with local schools is a massive step forward to achieving this. We believe it is necessary to engage with our local community, as simply achieving access is not enough – our residents should understand why it is important for us to gain access, why we take the serious steps that we do if access is not allowed, and also the importance of using gas safely throughout the year. Most importantly, to understand that gas safety is the responsibility of everyone!

An annual gas safety certificate is only part of this – we provide instruction (for example) on the dangers of all different types of appliances, including home gas barbeques, camping stoves, and solid fuel appliances. By ensuring that we reach a wider audience, we can help our community to be safer.

We also firmly believe that responsible authorities should engage with the wider community, and not simply their own tenants and leaseholders; by speaking out to school communities within our neighbourhoods we are reaching this wider community, making sure that the young people who are the next generation of gas users understand the importance of good gas safety, and that this information is also shared with their parents, guardians and carers.

We shall be returning to Sewell Park College in February 2012 to deliver a presentation to the 6th form students, who are from a large catchment area. These students, who are on the brink of leaving for various colleges and universities, many of whom may end up in rented accommodation, will be instructed on good gas safety, and what they should expect from their landlord. We believe it is innovative presentations such as this, which could potentially prevent fatalities that have been well documented in national news stories.

We will be rolling out the same presentation to other local schools across the city in the New Year, and we expect a similar response; the work we have done with one local high school has been highly commended by the school, the Gas Safe Register, tenants and councillors alike. We would hope to continue the work we are doing on an annual basis in each school, rolling this out to different year groups.

The work we have done on the website will continue to go from strength to strength, and since its recent roll out, we have had an extremely positive response from customers, who have been using the site to report repairs online, and to request call backs. We would expect to see this number grow, as more and more people become aware of the site, and we will continue to update and monitor the information on the site; the ability to change the information in accordance with the seasons will bring with it many benefits, i.e. information in the summer about the importance of testing the heating before the cold sets in, information about freezing pipes, and information about how to stay warm in the winter whilst keeping the heating bills low, not forgetting in these difficult financial times, information on where to find advice and help on fuel poverty.

3

Benefits

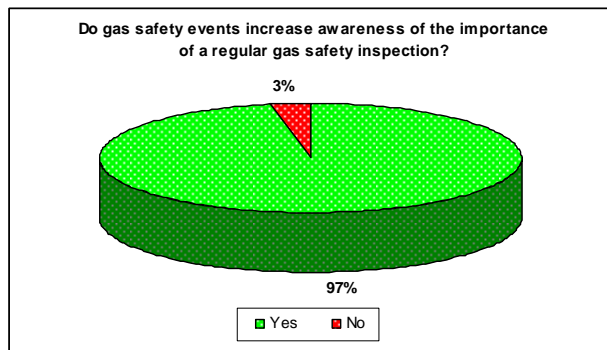
Question 2

What are the benefits?

To the client

The benefits of all the important work we do, and continue to do in conjunction with other partners is huge to us as an authority. Not only does it promote us as a responsible and caring landlord, but it also provides us with different ways to engage with communities. Events such as those held at local festivals provide customers and residents with a great way to speak to us about a wide range

of different issues, not only about gas safety, and it is great to have face to face time with our residents, and often easier to discuss issues in a less formal environment.



At every gas related event we hold, we ask questions and monitor feedback. We regularly collect and monitor data from these events, such as the sample question from a recent survey during gas safety week shown in the chart above.

The website gives us an extra avenue to gather customer information, such as satisfaction data for both heating repairs and gas servicing, and it also gives us another avenue to gather E&D data. By

using this data we can see which audiences prefer to contact us using this method, what their range of special needs may be, and help us find other avenues of contact for different tenant and resident groups.

As part of joined up working with our neighbourhood housing teams we will be collecting E&D information as part of the gas service visit itself – because we annually gain access to 100% of the properties, this is a great way of collecting this important data that may otherwise have been missed, and ensuring that the data is never more than 1 year out of date.

To the contractor

Working in partnership with Norwich City Council has enabled our contractor Gasway to deliver its strategic plan of developing the contracting arm of its well established gas servicing and repair organisation. Additionally it has enhanced the awareness of the Gasway brand as a local business inside its home city of Norwich. Local employment has benefitted for directly employed staff in terms of management, skilled engineers and administrative skill sets.

Community projects have allowed the business opportunity to strengthen the Gas Safety message within the local area with schools projects and other seminars. Such initiatives serve to broaden the attraction for school leavers, graduates and people looking for a career change to enter the gas industry through apprenticeship and other training schemes.

Working in partnership with the gas management team at Norwich City Council has brought a wealth of local authority intelligence. Ground breaking ideas to pioneer specialised on-line services for a tenant website has provided Gasway with a crucial level of understanding for people's needs in the local communities. Such information has better enabled the business to increase service and efficiency levels, all of which delivers a positive message to all concerned.

Gasway has a strong pedigree in delivering servicing and maintenance provision to thousands of homes and business since first establishing itself in 1982. A forward thinking business always reinvesting its profits towards new technologies in I.T. (operating and telephony system) and gas testing equipment, it has strived to deliver fast and accurate information in "real time" to customers and clients. Never has this been more important to Gasway than since delivering the provision of our gas servicing and repairs as principle gas contractor to Norwich City Council. Gas safety records are produced in volume to robust and strict disciplines establish by the NCC housing property services team.

Gasway has experienced the increasing benefits of scale associated with purchasing and other business objectives, particularly in the ability to concentrate its focus on developing greater relationships with local suppliers. The credibility of the Gasway brand has much improved within the local and national business sectors since engaging with us at Norwich City Council.

Between us, we have managed to build a level of understanding between client and contractor that is second to none. Continuous meetings, developing fresh innovative ideas and proactive key performance improvement measures capture the true essence of a modern day local authority working in tandem with a continually developing and expanding local family owned business such as Gasway. Major nationals have often failed to connect in such a positive manner and such success has rarely been seen with a more specialised local provider.

To the residents

Norwich City Council is dedicated and committed to involving tenants in shaping the housing services they receive. This is because we know that involving people in the management of their home and neighbourhood is vital to delivering better housing services and improving the quality of life for local communities.

Through the many consultations we do, the repairs and maintenance service remains a top priority for our tenants. This is why we have insured that there are a variety of involvement opportunities available for our tenants to be part of. With our tenants we have developed involvement opportunities where:

- Contract procurement is clear and transparent (members of our Norwich Tenants CityWide Board sit on our procurement panel)
- Contractor services are monitored and tested (tenants have gone to contractor open days spending time in each department)
- Tenants can talk to officers face to face in the community (a selection of events are delivered directly in the neighbourhood)
- Projects are developed with tenants as team members to deliver services that are suitable for them (the Norwich City Council and Gasway website was developed as a tenant, leaseholder and officer team)
- Tenants can help set performance targets and monitor how we are doing against them (we have a performance group that looks at targets and a repairs and rechargers group which monitors the repairs service and suggests improvements)

The gas procedures and projects have involved tenants and residents throughout, and benefit them in many ways. The website provides increased access to services, the work with schools and the road shows and events within the community provide a way for tenants and residents to put their views across, and raise awareness of important issues.

Most importantly, it is clear from our year on year improvement in our gas figures, and the decrease in the number of cases needing to be taken to court, that our residents are listening to us, and that through our on-going events and training, we have raised awareness for all, and made our resident's homes and neighbourhoods safer.

To the neighbourhood

Because we are gaining access to 100% of properties, by ensuring that the gas appliance database is regularly maintained and up to date, we can target the older and therefore less efficient appliances and put them into programmed replacement schemes, part funded by CESP/CERT money, provided through energy providers. This not only enables us to ensure the heating appliances are up to date, cost effective and efficient, it also enables us to tackle the fabric of the building and look at carrying out sustainability projects such as air-sourced heat pumps, external insulation, and solar thermal.

This work enables the council to reduce the emissions of city as well as reducing the likelihood of extreme fuel poverty within housing under council, ownership or management of the council. To date our per capita emissions have fallen 24% from 2005 with domestic emissions accounting for a considerable part of this result. This has resulted in our SAP ratings being often higher, on average, than the local private sector rental market.

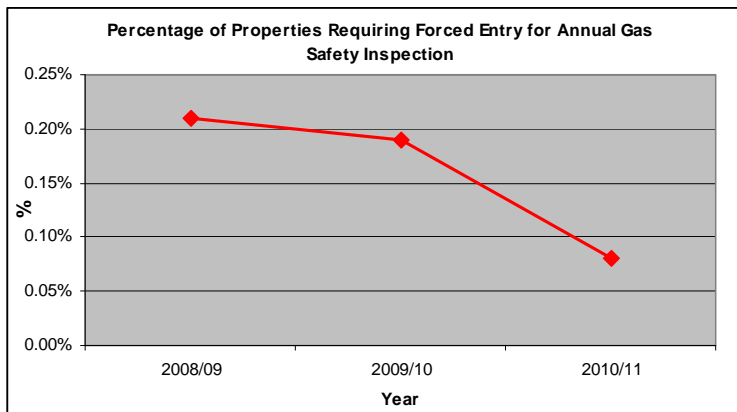
In addition to the above Gasway adheres to our corporate environmental policy and environmental strategy via the terms within their contract. They are required to assist the authority to reduce our own emissions by 30% in 5 as well as monitoring their own use of fuels, waste and water. To date Norwich City Council and our contractors have reduced our emissions by 16.9 from a baseline year of 2007.

Question 3

What were the financial costs and cashable benefits?

We have carried out a great deal of evaluation into the overall cost of taking a property to court and carrying out a forced entry to complete the annual gas safety inspection. Whilst the cost of obtaining a magistrates warrant remains relatively low, the overall cost of reaching the point where the file is ready to be taken to court, including officer and contractor time stands at approximately £1,000 per case.

The amount of work we have carried out to reduce cases that reaches this point has had a great impact on overall costs. Since 2008, we have reduced the number of cases reaching court to 13. Since the start of 2008 this is a 38% decrease. This is a saving in public money of £21,000.



The amount of cases that reach the point where they are notified that court proceedings may be imminent has also decreased; again, the cost of reaching the stage where the case is taken to our court officer is high, and again, this produces savings.

Norwich City Council firmly believes that it is our ongoing dedication to promoting good gas safety that has produced

these results. We are committed to partnership working, and have eradicated silo working; this ensures that the benefits are shared by everyone involved in the process, from the client, the contractor, the neighbourhood teams and court officers, but most importantly our residents, who are safer because of what we do.

We have regular monthly audits carried out by a 3rd party auditor to ensure that our contractor is carrying out work to the highest standard, and an annual office audit of both the client and contractor offices. The report produced helps us to shape services going forward, and identify where further savings can be made.

Gas servicing is a serious health and safety issue. Whilst there have certainly been outgoing costs associated with making the important changes in order to reach the enviable position we are in today, we believe that the benefits outweigh the costs, and that our attitude to staff training and partnership working ensures that outlays are kept to a minimum.

Question 4

How relevant is this as an example that might be followed by other organisations?

At Norwich City Council, we pride ourselves on our customer care and endeavour to put customers at the heart of everything we do. The innovative projects we have worked on would be relevant to not only all social housing landlords, but to all local authorities and caring agencies who work with members of the public, with health and safety at the forefront.

In these changing times, organisations must strive to find new, more efficient ways to work with their residents and diverse communities, and find new ways to engage with customers whilst operating with limited budgets. Whilst naturally there was a financial cost to the setting up of our website, this was not a large cost in comparison to the savings we know it will deliver over a period of time. The more residents we can encourage to contact us this way, the less resource is needed to answer telephone calls and written correspondence.

As an organisation we are committed to staff training and development; as such, our road shows and events are staffed by multi-trained officers, who have the ability to answer a wide range of queries in addition to the questions about the theme of the event itself. This level of training and commitment ensures we have a workforce who are committed to providing the customers of Norwich City Council with the best possible service, as we positively encourage council officers to develop and implement new innovative ideas and strategies that benefit our communities and the organisation as a whole.

This approach is something that could be mirrored by any organisation provided a positive attitude and culture exists and thrives. The housing property services team has been highly commended at the annual council wide awards for outstanding achievement and service for our focus and commitment to customer care, as well as being awarded team of the year. We have spent a significant amount of time in developing our team leaders and officers in all departments, to promote the importance of this service, signposting where to find information, having a structured and well documented process in order to achieve a joined up approach and eliminate silo working,

We are always happy to share our ideas and good practice, and we regularly participate in benchmarking and best practice seminars. We would be happy to host other organisations for a visit, and share all of our ideas and practices with them, as well as any correlating literature.

We would like our service to be held up as an example of best practice. As such we would be more than willing to share our lessons learnt with other authorities and organisations.

Provided other organisations are as committed as Norwich City Council to achieving excellence through customer engagement, commitment to staff training, and are willing to go the extra mile, they can achieve the results that we have been proud to mention within this submission.